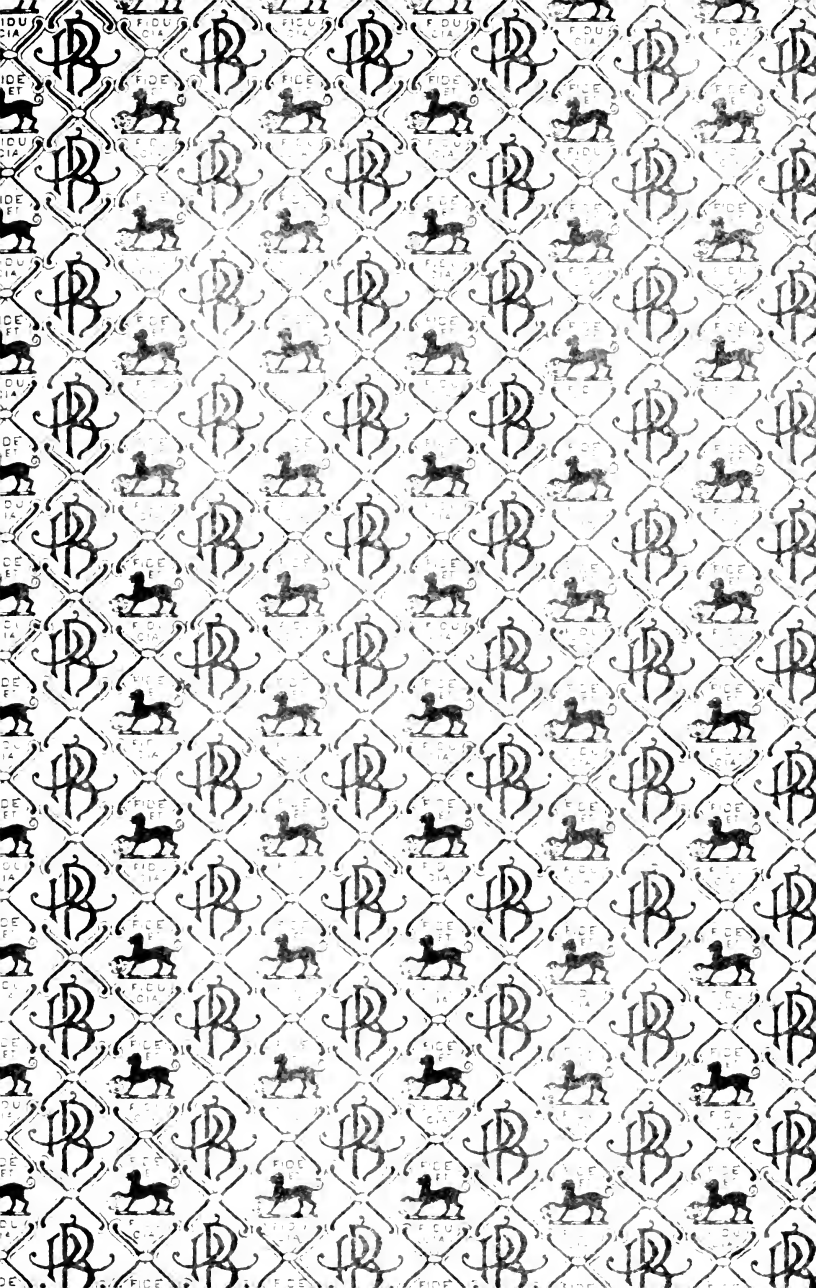


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SIR GODFREY'S GRAND-DAUGHTERS

SIR GODFREY'S GRAND-DAUGHTERS

A Novel

BY

ROSA NOUCHETTE CAREY

AUTHOR OF

'NELLIE'S MEMORIES,' 'LOVER OR FRIEND,' 'NOT LIKE OTHER GIRLS,' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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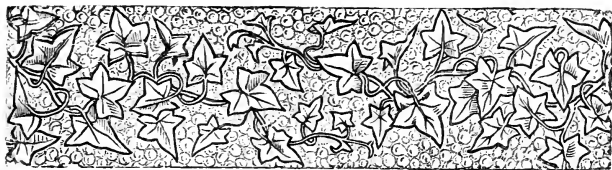
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SIR GODFREY'S GRAND- DAUGHTERS



CHAPTER I.

HESTER.

‘What a rare thing is a grown-up mind !’
LORD HOUGHTON.

AN elderly servant admitted them into a large gloomy hall. And the next moment Gerda was looking round a small, scantily-furnished drawing-room with a somewhat critical glance, while Mrs. Glyn sank into an easy-chair by the fire with a sigh of content.

‘I think I must be getting old,’ she remarked rather seriously, ‘for even a short walk seems to tire me now. Why, in the old days, I thought nothing of ten miles.’

‘I am sure you are not as strong as you ought to be,’ returned Gerda, with a trace of anxiety in her tone. ‘I was telling Bessie so this morning as we walked to school. You used not to pant when you went upstairs, Aunt Clare. And you are getting dreadfully thin. I am sure, from what Bessie says, you do far too much. The house and all that parish work were more than enough without teaching Nora and Janie.’

‘I think I have heard this all before,’ returned Mrs. Glyn, smiling. ‘Don’t you know I love work, Gerda—that I am never willingly idle a moment? To be sure,’ she continued, with her customary frankness, ‘I should be glad of an hour’s rest now and then. I think your uncle Horace has infused some of his energy into me, for as a girl I was dreadfully idle. But he sets us all such an example. Oh, is he not good, Gerda?’—with a sudden softening of her voice. ‘His life is just an unwritten sermon. If only my dear boy would take after him! We have not talked about Walter yet. Do you think him improved, Gerda? I do not mean in looks. Of course he is handsome—

he is quite a Hamlyn—but is he not growing a fine manly fellow?’

Gerda was spared an answer, as at that moment Mrs. Vincent entered, with an apology for keeping them waiting. ‘I was finishing a letter for Julius, and he would not let me go,’ she observed, as she kissed Mrs. Glyn and then shook hands warmly with Gerda.

For the first instant Gerda felt herself a little disappointed. This tall, worn-looking woman, with the sallow complexion and deep-set eyes, was hardly the Hester Vincent she had expected to see. No, she could never have been handsome, even in her youth, and her figure was too thin and angular for grace. But the next moment, as she smiled, Gerda was conscious of a thrill of recognition. Hester had her brother’s smile, and her eyes had the same steady, clear look that Gerda so well remembered. At once she felt herself attracted and interested. Mrs. Vincent smiled involuntarily as she noticed the girl’s earnest scrutiny.

‘We must not consider ourselves as strangers, Miss Meredith,’ she said in a

friendly manner. 'I have heard of you from my brother and Pamela, and your aunt and I are dear friends. You have come just in time to help me. Mrs. Glyn is working herself to death, and she expects her friends to stand by and see her do it.'

'Oh, Hester!' very reproachfully. 'This from you, of all people, who are wearing yourself to skin and bone.'

'Perhaps so ; but the process gives me no pleasure,' returned Mrs. Vincent, laughing. 'If you only knew how I hate this daily grind! I tell Julius that I conjugate verbs even in my dreams. Necessity is a hard task-master. When I come to those words, "kicking against the pricks," I always think of myself. I believe that I have quite forgotten how to play,' she went on with a sigh. 'When I watch Julius with Ray, I quite envy him his powers of amusement. Did I ever tell you what the child said once when I tried to build up a card-house for her? "I don't like playing with mother—she sighs so—and the cards don't like it neither."'

'What a naughty little Ray!'

'No, not naughty, poor darling! Only

there is no playfellow like her father. But we are turning off from the subject. I am really serious, Miss Meredith. Your aunt is killing herself.'

'I quite agree with you. I have just been telling her that it is wrong of her to teach Janie and Nora.'

'Wrong! it is more than wrong. Mr. Glyn must be blind indeed. Do you know that I have offered to have Janie and Nora here? They could learn with the other children, and it would give me no extra trouble. Mademoiselle is such a treasure to me. But, no, the Glyn pride is up in arms; they will not be beholden to anyone. And this is what they call friendship.'

But Mrs. Glyn checked her impetuous speech.

'Hester,' she said gently, and there were tears in her eyes, 'it hurts me to hear you talk like this. You must never say that again. I am proud—yes; but I think my pride is right. Gerda, you are a sensible girl; you shall judge between us. Would it be fair—would it be consistent—for me to shift my maternal burdens to the shoulders of this generous creature, who is already so

overweighted? You tell me I work hard, and I do not deny the fact; but with Hester existence is one long toil from early morning until midnight. No, you shall not silence me'—as Hester tried to stop her. 'You have brought this upon yourself. Have you not told me that you are often down by six, correcting the children's exercises?'

'I don't do that now,' returned Hester disconsolately; 'Julius will not let me; but I know I am dreadfully late at night. But, all the same, Janie and Nora would not add to my labours. Mademoiselle would see to them.'

But Mrs. Glyn shook her head with an affectionate smile.

'No, Hester dear—no; it must not be done; but, all the same, I am deeply grateful to you. Remember, I am an older woman than you, and have bought experience dearly. "Bear ye one another's burdens" must not be literally obeyed.'

'Will you consent to give up your district, then?' asked Hester, a little doggedly.

At this question Gerda clapped her hands softly; but Mrs. Glyn reddened and looked uncomfortable.

‘No, indeed! What would my husband say?’

‘Have you ever spoken to him on the subject?’ persisted Hester. ‘Miss Meredith, your presence gives me courage—there is strength in numbers; now I have you on my side, I feel more sanguine of victory. Come, Mrs. Glyn, we are both waiting for your answer.’

‘What an obstinate woman you are, Hester! I am not sure that I shall submit to this catechism. As a British subject, I claim the right to wear myself out if I choose. I wish for once I could tell a fib, but when I was a child Ananias and Sapphira were my pet bogies, and since then I have been so painfully truthful! Well, if you must know, I did once hint to Horace that I found the mothers’ meeting, and Bible-class, and the Friendly Girls’ Society, and all the parochial charities and accounts, as much as I could manage, and that the district was the last straw; but he did not see it at all—in fact, he was quite shocked. He said a clergy-woman had her duties as much as a clergy-man, and that I was bound to set a good example in the parish.’

‘And of course you submitted like a good wife!’ returned Mrs. Vincent in an exasperated tone. ‘I am very fond of the Vicar—in fact, he is one of my best friends; but all the same I have no patience with him.’

‘For pity’s sake change the subject, Gerda!’ pleaded Mrs. Glyn wearily. ‘You have no idea how I am persecuted.—If you want to lecture anyone, Hester, I should advise you to try your hand on Pamela.’

Then Mrs. Vincent looked very serious. ‘Poor dear Alick!’ she sighed; and then she glanced at Gerda.

‘Oh, you need not mind Gerda,’ returned Mrs. Glyn quickly. ‘Pamela has confessed her sins. I believe she is doing penance with Jessie Brown. Gerda knows all about Rebecca and the mutton-bone.’

‘Please don’t laugh!’ and Hester wore her schoolmistress’s look, and the slight frown that contracted her brow reminded Gerda still more of Dr. Lyall. It was with just such a frown that he had listened to Captain Hake’s joke on the night of the dinner-party. ‘It is no laughing matter, I assure you,’ she continued. ‘I never saw Alick more put out. He told me that things had come to

such a pass that he never knew what Pamela would do next ; that at times she behaved as though she were crazy or bewitched ; and that no scolding or coaxing on his part had any effect on her. She behaved as badly as possible that night, and as Rebecca was in her airs he could get no redress. It was literally a mutton bone that was placed on the table ; and to make things worse, there were five or six kinds of pickles.' Then, as Gerda laughed, and Mrs. Glyn followed her example : ' So it was the most uncomfortable meal possible. Even Derrick, with all his good-nature, hardly knew how to take it ; and there was Pam in her ridiculous harlequin dress—that red and pink thing that we all hate — smiling and chattering as though nothing were the matter.'

' I am perfectly ashamed of Pamela,' observed Mrs. Glyn, who was quite exhausted with laughing. ' I am rather surprised, after such an experience, that Dr. Lyall has ventured to invite us to dinner. I really think we ought to decline.'

' You must do nothing of the kind,' returned Hester decidedly. ' Pamela made it up with him this morning, and I believe she pro-

posed that you should be invited, as a sort of peace-offering. She has promised Alick that such a disgraceful affair shall never happen again ; and Derrick is to be asked, too.'

'In that case, I suppose we must accept ; but Horace never dines out if he can help it, so Gerda and I must go alone—that is, if she be willing.'

Then Gerda blushed, and returned hesitatingly that she supposed they ought to go.

'Walter must go in his father's place,' observed Mrs. Vincent ; then she paused, and stirred the fire rather absently, as though she were considering something. 'Walter has been here this morning,' she continued, but her tone was a little peculiar.

Mrs. Glyn did not seem to notice it—she only smiled at this piece of information.

'Both my husband and son are devoted to Mrs. Vincent,' she said, turning to Gerda. 'If Walter is ever missing at meal-times, we know he is at Daintree House. Hester understands boys as well as she does girls. I believe she is more in Walter's confidence than I am.'

'I thought Walter told you everything, Aunt Clare.'

‘If he keeps anything back, it is because he is so tender-hearted that he cannot bear to disappoint his mother ;’ and again Hester’s tone was strangely significant. Mrs. Glyn looked at her in surprise.

‘Is there anything I ought to know, Hester?’ she asked quickly.

‘Yes, dear ; and I told Walter so this morning. Your boy is a fine lad. If I were his mother, I should be proud of such a son. He takes after you, Mrs. Glyn—he has just your spirit and temper ; but if you will excuse me for saying it, I am afraid his father holds the reins a little too tightly.’

Mrs. Glyn sighed. It was evident that she could not contradict this ; but, as usual, she stood up loyally for her husband.

‘Horace is very fond of him, but he thinks young people require strictness. When he was a boy, he was kept under severe discipline. They used the rod, both literally as well as metaphorically, in those days. He has often told me that his youth was hardly a happy one. I wish Walter would confide more in his father,’ she went on. ‘Sometimes I am afraid Horace misunderstands him. He often complains that there is no

companionship between them, and that it is far easier to talk to Willie. When they take walks together, Walter never seems to have anything to say. Even when Horace told him that he had made up his mind to send him to Oxford, and that on his account we would gladly stint ourselves, Walter merely muttered something about undeserved kindness, and then relapsed into silence.'

'Were Walter's wishes ever consulted? I mean'—as Mrs. Glyn seemed startled by this question—'did Mr. Glyn ever give him the choice of a profession?' "They want to make a parson of me. I think every fellow ought to have a say about his own future." These were his very words, as he sat opposite to me this morning.'

Mrs. Glyn grew very pale—she seemed hardly prepared for this.

'Do you mean that Walter has changed his mind?' she asked. 'Hester, you must not be hard on us. From a little fellow, Walter always knew we had dedicated our firstborn, and I never heard an objection from his lips. He used to say sometimes that he did not see how we could afford to send him to Oxford; but he never gave us a

hint that the idea was displeasing to him. I feel deeply hurt that Walter should not have told me this himself ; and as for Horace, I dare not think what the disappointment will be to him.'

'I have told you nothing—nothing,' replied Mrs. Vincent. 'When Walter begged me to tell you the truth, I flatly refused. "I will be no go-between. I am your friend, but I am also your parents' friend. It is not for me to inflict this pain." Poor dear fellow! he looked so unhappy. "I must go through with it, I suppose," he said at last ; "but I warn you that it will be a half-hearted affair. I shall never make a clergyman like my father." And to comfort him, I promised that I would give you a hint.'

'Thank you, Hester,' returned Mrs. Glyn in a sad voice ; but she looked old and fagged as she spoke. 'I will not ask you any more questions ; I will speak to Walter myself.' Then Gerda and Mrs. Vincent exchanged looks of sympathy. It seemed to the girl as though years had been added to her aunt Clare's age. 'Walter is a good boy ; he will not disappoint you,' she whispered ; but Mrs. Glyn shook her head with a sigh : her lad

was too much like his mother, she thought to herself ; if only he had taken more after his father !'

' I am afraid this is a dull visit for Miss Meredith,' observed Hester, becoming mindful of her duties as a hostess.—' Shall I take you into the studio ?' turning to Gerda, ' and Mrs. Glyn shall join us when she likes. Tea is always served in the studio,' she continued, as Gerta assented—' partly because it is the most cheerful room in the house, and partly because Julius allows no monopoly of guests. He is very sociable, and he always insists on my bringing my lady friends to his room.'

' Yes, go, Gerda ; I will follow you directly ;' and Mrs. Glyn nodded with a faint smile. She seemed suddenly cold, and shivered a little as she drew closer to the fire. ' My poor Horace, what a blow for him !' she thought, as the closing door left her alone.

' Please wait a moment, Mrs. Vincent !' exclaimed Gerda as they stood in the hall. ' If Walter does not wish to take orders, has he made up his mind to any other profession ? You may tell me,' as Hester hesitated ; ' it will be quite safe.'

' He wishes to go out to the Colonies !'

Gerda uttered an exclamation of dismay.

‘ He is no student, though his father does not seem to have found this out ; he loathes his classical studies. Some friends of his are going out to New Zealand, and he is wild to join them.’

‘ It will half kill Aunt Clare to part with him ; she dotes on Walter.’

‘ And Walter is devoted to her ; but I am afraid his father rather repels him, and that there is very little sympathy between them. I have boys of my own, Miss Meredith, and they are good boys, too, though their mother says it ; and I think very deeply about the duties of parents. It seems to me,’ she continued, speaking with deep earnestness, that people have their own preconceived notions of things, and that they are too apt to thrust their own ready-made opinions on their children, instead of meeting them half-way. Do you suppose those vigorous, fresh young minds have no ideas of their own worth enunciating, that we must for ever crush them with our stale experience?’

‘ Yes, I see what you mean,’ returned Gerda thoughtfully ; ‘ Uncle Horace is rather too strict with Walter.’

‘How are these young plants to grow, and blossom, and bear fruit, unless we give them plenty of room? Will our candlelight wisdom ripen them as fast as God’s blessed sunshine? Ah! perhaps you are too young to understand me; but in my opinion it is the young who are so close to God, the little ones, who, with all their faults, lean more trustfully upon Him!’

‘I wish Aunt Clare could hear you,’ returned Gerda wistfully.

She was charmed with Mrs. Vincent. How childish and trite Pamela’s flighty talk seemed beside Hester’s grand seriousness! They were pacing up and down the cold dark hall as they conversed, and Hester’s deep rich voice seemed to penetrate Gerda’s soul. This was what she loved, to dig deep and get at the heart of things, as the miner burrows in the earth for the coveted ore. Pamela’s clear sparkling conversation, at once playful and pert, reminded her of the scratching of a bantam cock over the surface of a dust-heap where a child’s tinsel toys have got buried: the treasures that came to light were so flimsy, and so brilliant.

‘Your aunt Clare is the “perfect woman

nobly planned,"' returned Hester in her quick, vivid speech. 'Do you know, I lost my heart to her the first moment I saw her, and that is just three years ago. How is it we have never met, Miss Meredith? Ah, I remember: I was away the last time you were at Crome-hurst, and I think the same thing happened the year before.'

'What a pity to have lost so much time!' observed Gerda in a regretful tone; and Mrs. Vincent smiled at the compliment. 'Of course Aunt Clare often spoke of you among her other friends; but I suppose we only take passing interest in strangers. When Pamela mentioned your name, I thought it was some other Vincents, the lawyer's family in Park Street.'

'Yes, I see. Shall we go into the studio now? this hall is far too cold and draughty;' and then, as she opened the door near them, a stream of warm firelight met them. 'My husband is a fire-worshipper,' observed Hester. 'Fie! what extravagance, Julius, all those splendid logs heaped up in such profusion!'

'They were meant as a welcome to your friends, you parsimonious woman!' returned

Mr. Vincent playfully, as he sprang up from his chair. 'Where is Mrs. Glyn?' looking beyond them. And Hester explained that she was resting for a little. 'I should have known you were her niece, without any introduction, Miss Meredith,' he continued, as he wheeled up the easy-chair for Gerda, and hastened to put a glass screen between her and the blaze. 'Mrs. Glyn is my ideal of an English gentlewoman—plenty of heart and plenty of common-sense, two very necessary ingredients in a woman.'

Hester smiled as she seated herself by the couch, where Ray was sitting, propped up with cushions, playing with a small white kitten.

'How is my darling this evening?' Gerda heard her whisper in the child's ear, as she stroked the fair, smooth hair, that shone like gold in the firelight. But Ray shook off the caressing hand a little irritably.

'You have waked kitty, mother. She was ever so fast asleep,' she said reproachfully. 'Ah, she is crying now!' as a faint, piteous mew corroborated her words. 'Oh, please go away while I hush her to by-by again;'

and Ray knitted her baby brows rather angrily.

‘You must not be cross, my precious,’ began Hester, in a firm, admonishing tone, but her eyes were full of wistful tenderness.

But Mr. Vincent interposed in an airy manner :

‘Don’t be bracing, Hester—let me beg you not to be bracing—please remember our compact ; in the studio the schoolmistress is not at home. Don’t you call that an admirable arrangement ?’ addressing Gerda, as Hester drew back with a wounded expression. ‘My wife and I are exact opposites—I don’t believe we think alike on a single point—this makes life interesting, not to say exciting. In the house, in the school, she rules supreme, and I am her devoted and humble slave ; in this room,’ looking round him with pardonable pride, ‘Beauty-bright holds absolute sway. Is it not so, my pet ? We indulge our little tempers unchecked ; we have our variable moods ; we enjoy a wholesome change of temperature from storm to sunshine.’

‘It is false kindness to the child never to check her irritability. I have told you this

over and over again, Julius,' returned Hester quietly, as she took up her position at the tea-table. 'But where Ray is concerned you are not reasonable.'

Hester spoke calmly and without temper, and Mr. Vincent received her rebuke with the utmost good-humour.

'My wife is one of the best women in the world,' he observed in an undertone, 'but she is a trifle too bracing. When I want to punish her I call her "Mrs. Teach'em." For some esoteric reason she objects to the name.'

'Julius! why will you be so absurd?' returned his wife, trying to smile. 'Now I am going to commission you to fetch Mrs. Glyn.'

Mr. Vincent nodded and vanished.

'What a beautiful room!' observed Gerda as the door closed.

The contrast between this warm, softly-lighted apartment, with its luxurious easy-chairs and carved oak cabinets, and the meagre, shabbily-furnished drawing-room they had just left, affected her strangely, and gave her a feeling of moral vertigo. If they were poor—and one glance at Mrs. Vincent's

old gown attested that fact—how could Mr. Vincent have obtained those costly Persian rugs and the dainty embroideries that draped the couch where Ray nestled among her cushions? The old china on brackets, the outlandish Eastern garments and fragments of tapestry, were all of value. An easel, with a half-finished picture, was drawn ostentatiously into the middle of the room, with a yellow veil thrown over it.

‘I dare say my husband will show you his picture,’ observed Hester, as she saw Gerda glance at it. ‘He is a little whimsical at times, and dislikes any sort of exhibition; but he seems in a better mood this evening. Yes, this is a delicious room, and Julius has shown a great deal of taste in his arrangements. Ray spends her days here. I cannot coax her to stop with me for half an hour; she is never happy without her father. I am afraid my little girl is very undisciplined; but Julius will not allow me to thwart her. It is a sad mistake,’ looking at the child’s small, white face with almost passionate tenderness.

Ray had recovered her temper, and was fondling her kitten and talking to it quite happily.

‘How old is she?’ asked Gerda in a whisper.

‘She is seven, but no one would take her to be more than five—she is so tiny. She has a diseased hip, and sometimes she suffers a great deal. And then she will allow no one to touch her but her father.’

‘It must be very hard for you,’ observed Gerda.

‘Yes, and at first I felt it a good deal. But, after all, it is very natural. Ray hardly sees me except at meal-times. I am always in the schoolroom. And then you have no idea how patient and good Julius is with her. He will pace up and down the room with her for hours when she is fretful with pain. And he often paints with her on his knee. How few men,’ she continued, ‘would set aside popular prejudice, and be seen in broad daylight wheeling a child’s perambulator! But Julius cares nothing for the opinion of strangers,’ she finished, with a charming smile.



CHAPTER II.

DR. LYALL RELIEVES HIS MIND.

‘It is far easier to be wise for others than to be for one’s-self.’—LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

‘We pardon in the degree we love.’—*Ibid.*

A MOMENT later Mr. Vincent returned to the room with his guest. Mrs. Glyn had recovered herself, and there was no perceptible effort in the way she responded to his gay badinage. Evidently they were old foes, and accustomed to skirmishes. ‘My practical friend,’ as Mr. Vincent called her, ‘who worships at the shrine of utility.’

‘By-the-by, Mr. Vincent,’ she observed, as he handed her a cup of tea, ‘I hope you intend to treat my niece to a view of the picture,’ with a slight emphasis that brought the colour to Mr. Vincent’s face.

He was evidently a little sensitive on this

point, for he hesitated for a moment. 'Can Miss Meredith decipher hieroglyphics?' he returned rather pointedly.

Mrs. Glyn broke into a soft laugh. 'Your husband bears malice, Hester. He has never forgiven my criticism. I am such a terrible Philistine, and, you see, my art education has been so sadly neglected. Miss Meredith has far more imagination than I, Mr. Vincent. She will not shock you by her crude remarks. Gerda, you must ask very prettily. Mr. Vincent will not be so rude as to refuse a lady.'

Gerda had been sitting quietly in her warm corner, listening to the conversation. Mr. Vincent amused and interested her. He looked handsomer than ever in his black velvet coat, with a crimson flower in his buttonhole. His hair was a little long, and his dark complexion certainly gave him the appearance of a foreigner, especially as the heavy silky moustache entirely concealed the mouth. Gerda could not suppress a secret incredulity and wonder as she looked at Hester's grave, careworn face. Why had this man, with his wonderful powers of fascination, fallen in love with a woman like

Hester? But when she hinted this to Mrs. Glyn afterwards, that lady was very ready with her answer.

‘You are quite wrong if you imagine the love was all on Hester’s side,’ she observed. ‘He was crazy to get her, and yet she was no beauty even then. You do not understand, Gerda, what charm Hester’s strong, calm nature has for a man like Mr. Vincent. With his mercurial temperament, he is very subject to depression, and no one can soothe him as his wife does. Of course, he tries her. They are such complete opposites, and he has not her high principles; but, in his own way, he is very fond of her.’

Gerda rose rather eagerly as Mr. Vincent stepped up to the veiled easel. And then a smaller picture attracted her notice.

‘Oh, what a lovely little face!’ she exclaimed. ‘It reminds me slightly of your little girl, only it is so round and rosy.’

‘“Cinderella!” Oh, poor mite! she has fallen asleep on a cinder-heap. But that is rather a sorry prince!’ pointing to a clumsy figure with a sack over his head and shoulders, ‘who is looking at the child with uncouth benevolence.’

‘Is it not a charming picture?’ observed Hester, in a pleased tone. ‘I am so fond of that dear little “Cinderella,” and so is Ray. Oh, if Julius would only take my advice, and paint more pictures in this style!’

‘Pshaw! a mere pot-boiler,’ returned her husband disdainfully; ‘but this comes of marrying a daughter of Heth. My wife has not the faintest idea of art; my little sister-in-law is far more appreciative. Pamela has feeling; she can make allowances for a poor artist.’

‘I understood that Pamela did not admire your new picture,’ observed Hester, in a pained tone. She was accustomed to these sort of speeches, but they always hurt her. It was one of her daily trials that Julius never came to her for sympathy in his work, that her opinion was never desired. ‘She certainly told me that it was wanting in distinctness.’

‘I did not say she admired it, my dear,’ in rather an irritable tone. ‘Admiration is the last thing I expect; but Pamela paid me the compliment of a most painstaking study,’ which was certainly true; but Mr. Vincent might have added that her criticism was a little vague: ‘It has a good name, Julius:

"The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts;" it is all distance and haze, and golden light. Who are those people coming out of that flame-coloured cloud? Dear me!' putting up her pince-nez and frowning horribly, 'are they people or crows? Oh, I see, spirits from the vasty deep. Thank you, Julius—an immense subject; but you have treated it with wonderful breadth and liberality.'

Gerda stood in perplexed silence; she could make nothing of the picture; it was a dream, a nightmare of confused colouring, of witch-like faces and dim, unfinished draperies.

'It is not easy to understand,' she faltered. 'I suppose I am not a good judge; but I prefer "Cinderella" a thousand times.'

'Many thanks for your frankness,' returned Julius with easy courtesy, as he covered up his precious picture; but there was a slight cloud on his brow. This was always his luck; no one could understand him. They were all barbarous, these Philistines; no one could give him sympathy but Pamela, and even she had failed him. 'Cinderella,' indeed! a mere bagatelle, a poor shifty pot-

boiler that he had painted when his wife's tongue had lashed him a little too unmercifully. Why had they not made him a stockbroker or a shopkeeper? his ideal would not have plagued him then. It was the old story, after all—he was the unappreciated genius, the square peg in the round hole. He ought to have married Pamela, only unfortunately he had fallen in love with Hester. And then, as he covered up his picture, Hester held out her hand to him with a penitent look.

‘I wish, oh, I do wish I could see it with your eyes, Julius,’ she whispered, and he was instantly mollified.

‘My best friend,’ he returned in a gay insouciant tone, ‘you can only see as far as your eyes will permit you to see. If your sight be imperfect, you must blame Nature. Leave me to flirt with the divine goddess, while you and your girls sit in the groves of Parnassus. Do they add up long columns of figures in Parnassus, my Hester? Do they evoke the once renowned Lindley Murray among those pleasing shades? Keep to your pupils, and allow me to intoxicate myself with dreams that will never come

true ;' and then he kissed his wife's thin hand with a sort of boyish chivalry, and hastened to put the glass screen between Ray's couch and the firelight. The child had fallen asleep in the drowsy warmth, and lay with her cheek against the kitten.

'Is she really asleep? Let me carry her up to bed,' pleaded Hester. 'I can undress her before she wakes; please let me, Julius, it is far better so. You remember what Alick said?' and Mr. Vincent yielded unwillingly.

'Alick, our family oracle, Mrs. Glyn, the young man's guide, counsellor, and friend. "Why, talk of the——" I will spare your ears, ladies, and leave my quotation unfinished; but by my father's shade it is our domestic Esculapius himself;' and Hester with a bright face lifted the sleeping child and carried her out of the room.

Gerda bent over some old engravings. The fire was hot and her face burnt; she, too, had recognised the voice, the quiet voice with that timbre in it that was at once so penetrating and indescribable, and which made her pulse beat faster. Pshaw! what a goose she was! Why should the sound of a certain voice turn her breathless and

giddy? She and Dr. Lyall were good friends, quite old friends now. Of course she would be glad to see him; nevertheless, Gerda shrank back into her corner, and so completely effaced herself behind the screen that Dr. Lyall's searching look round the room failed to discover her.

'I thought Hester told me Miss Meredith was here,' he said in a perplexed tone, as he shook hands with Mrs. Glyn. 'Ah, I see;' and he advanced so quickly to Gerda's corner that she had hardly time to put down the engravings. But she had noticed everything—the start, the significant tone, the pleased, friendly light in his eyes, that somehow changed and became thoughtful all at once, as they rested on her downcast face. 'Was she going to be shy with him again?' he wondered.

'So you have come!' was all he found to say—not a very brilliant commencement to a conversation; and Gerda returned very demurely that she had long owed her aunt Clare a visit, and that it was more convenient for her to leave home just now.

'I am very glad to see you again,' he replied, with the pleasant frankness that was

natural to him ; but to this Gerda made no answer. Why did she feel such a sense of rest in this man's presence ? She neither desired to talk nor to hear him talk. Her eyes had a soft depth in them that seemed new to him. As he looked at her, the meaning of it all seemed to break suddenly upon him. 'Is she glad, too ?' he asked himself. 'Am I only a conceited fool ? Or can it be possible that she, too, is glad ?' And then he sat down beside her, and talked across the room to his brother-in-law and Mrs. Glyn. 'I met Hester just outside—she was carrying Ray up to bed. You have not taken my advice, Julius. The child has certainly caught a chill. You had no business to take her out in this east wind.'

'Was the wind in the east ? That is why my temper has been so bad to-day,' returned his brother-in-law lazily. 'Ray insisted on a drive, as she called it ; and I had not the heart to refuse her. When she complained of the cold, I brought her home, so there is no harm done, my dear Medicus.'

'I am not so sure of that,' returned Dr. Lyall.—'Mrs. Glyn, I wish you would lecture this fellow. He monopolizes Ray, and

leaves the boys to their mother. It ought to be the other way round, I tell him. Hester would carry out my orders about her much better.'

'She is too bracing,' murmured Julius; 'and Beauty-bright and I object to bracing. It only suits Harry and Phil—they are such hardy little chaps. By-the-by, Alick, I told you how it would be. That beast Ludlow is making up to Harry—exchanges books with him, and fags for him at cricket. Fancy, a cad like Ludlow!'

'Ludlow!—where have I heard the name?'

'I am sure I don't know,' returned Julius irritably; 'but I suppose, if you use your eyes, you must have seen "Thomas Ludlow, Draper," up on Crown Hill. Do you think I care for my sons to be chums with the town boys? I have threatened Harry with a thrashing if he does not cut him—and pretty sharp, too.'

'Good heavens, Vincent! how can you be so unwise?' returned Dr. Lyall, with unusual sharpness. 'What harm can it do the lads? They are not likely to know each other in later life. Of course I know Thomas Ludlow—a most respectable man. Don't be

such an ass, Julius! I told you a Grammar School must be mixed, and it will never do for Harry and Phil to give themselves airs. Ludlow junior is a stout fellow, and he might object to be cut; and his wounded feelings might find expression in whacking Harry.'

'I can't help that,' returned Julius obstinately. '*Noblesse oblige*, and I cannot allow Harry to forget that he is the son of a gentleman. Hester manages the boys—she has good nerve, and does not mind their noise; but when I interfere I expect to be minded. —Am I not right, Mrs. Glyn? I appeal to you. Is not the Vicar master in his own house?'

Then Mrs. Glyn smiled and looked across at Gerda, and Dr. Lyall began to laugh.

'Julius, you really are an absurd fellow! When you take a crotchet into your head, there is no getting you to listen to reason. —We will set the Vicar to talk to him, eh, Mrs. Glyn?' Then Julius drew himself up in a dignified manner, and his smile was not as pleasant as usual. 'Mind what you are about, old man! If you make the place too hot for Harry, you will have to look out for another school.' Dr. Lyall spoke good-

humouredly, but there was a certain meaning in his tone; and then he glanced at Gerda, and met a soft, amused look. 'Mrs. Glyn,' he continued, changing the subject abruptly, and ignoring his brother-in-law's sulky look, 'you have received Pamela's invitation. May we hope to see you and Miss Meredith on Monday—the Vicar, too?' he put in hastily, as though by an after-thought.

'I am afraid you must not expect my husband, he is so busy just now with his classes. Shall we say yes, Gerda?' And Gerda smiled assent.

'Thank you,' was all Dr. Lyall's answer; but his tone spoke volumes to Gerda's ears. And then Mrs. Glyn got up, and said they must be going; it was dreadfully late—nearly six—and they had been there for hours.

Dr. Lyall followed them out into the dimly-lighted hall, and while Mr. Vincent put up the collar of his coat, and shivered ostentatiously as he opened the door, his brother-in-law quietly took down his hat from the peg.

'I am going to see these ladies home, Julius,' he observed. 'Tell Hester that I will be back in half an hour or so;' and then, in spite of a shocked protest on Mrs.

Glyn's part, he went round to Gerda's side, with an observation on the roughness of the pavement in Daintree Road.

How Gerda enjoyed that walk ! and yet, as she recalled it afterwards, she could not remember that Dr. Lyall had addressed her once. He had talked to Mrs. Glyn about a troublesome vestry meeting, and he had a great deal to say about a certain Job Wiggins, whose mulish obstinacy had vexed the Vicar's soul.

'What is one to do in such a case?' he observed, with energy. 'The fellow ought to have been kicked out;' and he was still on the subject of Job Wiggins when they reached the door of St. Jude's Vicarage.

'Will you come in, Dr. Lyall? My husband will be delighted to see you.'

'Not to-night, thanks,' he returned hastily; and then he shook hands with them. 'Good-night; we shall see you on Monday,' was all he said to Gerda. Nevertheless, she went up to her room with a warm, satisfied feeling, for which she could find no adequate reason.

But there was no tranquillity in Dr. Lyall's mind, as he walked rapidly through the dark streets. A sense of conflict, of turmoil, a

suggestion of possible danger, alternated with a certain blissful consciousness to which he would give no name.

‘Was she glad, too?’ he muttered. ‘She makes too much of the little service I rendered her. I could see how well she remembers it, even now. It is a sort of link between us. Tut! what a fool I am! I believe that girl, with her soft looks, has bewitched me. How is a man to escape his fate? It is Kismet. If only one could run away from danger! But now she is here——’ He stopped abruptly. ‘And why not—and why not, if only she would have it so?’ he thought; but he blushed like a boy in the darkness. ‘After all, she has refused the rich man;’ and his hand trembled a little as he rang the bell at Daintree House.

He knew where to look for his sister. Not in the studio, where Julius had now lighted his reading-lamp, and was enjoying his cigarette and a Russian novel together, and basking in the fragrant warmth like some sleek, well-conditioned animal. Hester would be casting up accounts, or correcting them, in the shabby little drawing-room, where no logs spluttered or emitted brilliant sparks.

Hester's frugal, housewifely soul would not permit her to indulge in such extravagances ; she burnt her coals warily. She had drawn up an easy-chair close to the fender, and her well-used blotting-book was in her lap ; but at her brother's entrance she looked up with a smile of welcome.

' Dear Alick, this is so good of you !' she said, making room for him, and stirring the smouldering fire until it blazed more cheerfully. But he looked round the room with rather a dissatisfied air.

' Why do you not keep Julius company ?' he asked. ' I will lay you anything that he has a glorious fire in the studio. He is a perfect salamander.'

' Julius never likes to see me doing accounts,' she returned reluctantly. ' He says it spoils the flavour of his cigar to see me harassing myself over pounds, shillings, and pence, and I hate to disturb him.'

Hester was too honest not to tell the whole truth, but she looked at Alick a little beseechingly, as though to entreat his forbearance for her husband. But Dr. Lyall was not in his usual mood.

' You are very wrong, Hester,' he said

bluntly. 'You are feeding Julius's selfishness. Men are mostly selfish,' he continued, as Hester looked a little unhappy at this; 'but a good wife ought not to pander to her husband's weakness. Why should he not help you with your accounts? Why are you to work and he to play? You spoil him dreadfully, and he takes advantage of your good-humour, like the rest of the world. He is far too ready to work the willing horse.'

'I wish you were not so hard on Julius,' she returned sorrowfully. 'You may be right, Alick—indeed, you are always right; but you cannot quite enter into a wife's feelings.'

'Can I not, Essie?' and as she heard the old pet name, there was a sudden moisture in the deep-set eyes. 'My dear, you do not know how thoroughly I do understand, but you must forgive me if I speak rather plainly. After all, Julius is your husband, and not the eldest of your children.'

Then she gave a dreary little laugh.

'Alick, you absurd boy! But, of course, I see what you mean—that I pet Julius, and give way to him, when I ought to be firm. But if you knew how difficult it is for me!'

‘We all have our difficulties, Hester.’

‘Yes, dear ; and Pamela is your difficulty. Sometimes I think Julius and she are alike. They are both so wayward and unreasonable. But it does not make you as unhappy to thwart Pamela as it makes me when I have to deprive my poor boy of any of his little comforts. I think that is my worst trouble. I would work night and day to make Julius happy.’

If Dr. Lyall was inwardly touched at this wifely confession, he would not allow his sister to see it. On the contrary, he regarded her with the stern and slightly contemptuous look that he kept for refractory patients.

‘I do not suppose your conscience applauds you, Hester,’ he answered coldly. ‘If you call this conjugal devotion, I should classify it as rank weakness.’

Then a gleam of anger came into Hester’s eyes. She was not a meek woman ; and, though she could bear a great deal from this dearly-loved brother, she considered this speech a hard one.

‘Alick, you are really too bad !’

‘Yes, of course, because I tell you the truth.’ But his tone was a little softer.

‘My dear Hester, where your husband is concerned, you are the weakest woman I know. And yet no one is really stronger. You sacrifice yourself, you slave all day—I might say night, too—for Julius and the children. You are worth them all put together, and yet in your own eyes you are nothing at all. Julius must be comfortable, and so you dispense with comforts. A smoky fire will do for you, so that he has logs to burn in profusion. He sits in his luxurious room, pampered in soul and body, while the woman he vowed to protect is toiling to keep a roof over his head. Hester, you try my patience too much. I will not praise you for this. Let others do it if they will. I love you far too much to bolster you up with false sophistry. One day you will repent this weakness, and will be the first to tell me so. There,’ rising from his chair, ‘I call that a regular lecture, and I mean every word of it.’

‘You have made me very unhappy,’ returned Hester in a dejected tone.

Then he laughed and kissed her forehead.

‘It is a wholesome blister, Essie, and I trust an effective one. Now let us change

the subject. Where are the boys? Oh, I remember, it is a schoolfellow's birthday. By-the-by, Julius talked a good deal of rubbish just now about Ludlow junior. Master Hal is to cut him, or have a sound thrashing. As I am responsible for the lad's education, you may as well let Julius know that I shall stand no nonsense.'

'No, indeed, Alick! I really will make Julius hear reason where the boys are concerned. You have a right to expect obedience.'

'Very well, then, I will leave it in your hands. Poor little lad! there was never a boy who deserved a thrashing less. If his father lays a finger on him without due reason, he will have to answer for it to me. I am Harry's sponsor; and, as far as responsibility goes, the lads are more mine than his.'

'You may trust me 'to put it right,' she interrupted hurriedly. 'Where the boys are concerned I am always firm. It is only Ray'—and then her lip trembled a little. She was anxious about her child, but she feared to unburden herself to her brother.

He looked at her rather sharply. 'She has another cold, eh? What a fool Julius is, to be sure! He will be the death of her one

day. Never mind, I dare say it is nothing. I will look in to-morrow, and see how she is. By-the-by, can you give Derrick a bed on Monday, or shall we put him up for once ?'

'I think he had better come here.'

'So do I—so that is settled. Well, I must be going.'

But Hester did not seem willing to part with him. Her brief anger had died away. Alick had been a little rough with her, but, of course, it had been for her good. But what brother could compare with him in goodness ? Was he not her prop—her mainstay ? Was he not always ready to stand in the breach when she required help ?

'I never want you to go,' she said affectionately, as she helped him on with his great-coat. 'We have had such a nice afternoon ! Miss Meredith is a sweet girl : she is so gentle and well-bred ; and though she is very quiet, she has a good deal in her.'

'Do you think so ? Yes, I dare say you are right. Women generally understand each other.'

'What a hurry you are in, Alick ! Do, pray, put on your gloves, or your fingers will

be nipped. Yes, we had such a nice talk. Well, if you must be off——'

'I will look in to-morrow,' he responded absently.

Then, as Hester stood on the doorstep, peering out into the wintry darkness, two small figures burst through the gate, and ran up to her with a joyous war-whoop.

'We have had such a jolly afternoon, mother! and Herbert's cake was rare good stuff—cut and come again, that was the style. Was that Uncle Alick we passed just now? He did not take any notice. Bob Ludlow said it looked like him.'

'Yes, it was Uncle Alick. But, Harry, boy, just listen to me a moment. When you bid father good-night, you had better not say anything about Bob—not unless you are asked'—with a sudden fear that she might be undermining Harry's sturdy veracity.

'Father vows he will give me a thrashing if I don't give Bob up.—You heard him, Phil.—Why, only a cad would give up a chum to escape any amount of flogging. So dad need not try that on.' And Harry stuck his hands in his pockets, and looked at his mother with clear boyish eyes.

‘Dad won’t touch you, my son,’ returned Hester calmly. ‘After all, I think you had better go upstairs quietly, and I will bid him good-night for you both. Don’t wake Ray ; she is sleeping peacefully to-night.’ And Hester kissed and blessed her boys, and dismissed them with a smile.





CHAPTER III.

WALTER'S DECISION.

‘Though God take the sun out of heaven, we must have patience.’—GEORGE HERBERT.

It was Friday evening, and the Vicar was absorbed by his half-written sermon. He had left it reluctantly to take his place at the dinner-table ; but he was still too abstracted to notice his wife's grave, preoccupied looks. A passage on freewill was too obscure, and he feared the whole paragraph must be rewritten. Mr. Glyn seldom wrote doctrinal sermons ; he preferred to deliver brief, pungent discourses, wherein he would inveigh with terrible sternness against some nineteenth-century wickedness. The hardworked City man winced as he listened to the current of invective that rolled over his head, and

wondered in his stupid, John Bull way if he were really the worldling and Mammon-worshipper at whom those hard terms were flung.

The Vicar was not much given to measure his words in the pulpit ; he loved the scathing denunciations of the older prophets. Honest Thomas Ludlow waxed a little indignant as the Vicar dwelt on the moral turpitude, the double-dealing, the corruption and nepotism of the present age ; illiberality, worldliness, deviation from rectitude, and the Judas kiss that betrays principle.

‘ The Vicar might as well have hurled a few big stones at us at once,’ he grumbled as he walked home with his wife. ‘ Nepotism ! I wonder what on earth he meant by that, Betsy ? He thinks us a bad lot ; but I don’t know that all this fault-finding does much for a man. It is not my business ; but I should say that a soft word now and then would encourage a poor chap to do better.’

Honest Tom spoke out of the bitterness of an awakened conscience, for, strange to say, that pure and lofty standard that Horace Glyn held up before his people made them somewhat heartily ashamed of

themselves. The Vicar did not spare them, but, then, he did not spare himself either : if he preached an impossible perfection to them, at least he strove, as far as human flesh and blood could strive, to live up to his preaching, and perhaps this was why the seats at St. Jude's were never empty.

Truth and earnestness seldom fail to convince men, and so it was that, in spite of his severity, Horace Glyn was more respected than Mr. Higginbotham, though the latter preached smooth Evangelical sermons, of almost honeyed sweetness.

So for once Mr. Glyn failed to notice his wife's sad, tired face, and it was only Walter who cast anxious glances at his mother from time to time. Could Mrs. Vincent have said anything? Walter's face grew a little hot as he bent over his plate, and then he looked at his father and shivered.

When dinner was over, the Vicar went back to his study, and Walter betook himself to his bedroom. He had some Greek to prepare for his tutor, and the warm drawing-room and the girls' chatter would hardly conduce to help him with his work ; so he wrapped himself up in an old ulster, and,

lighting his gas, sat down to his books with a dogged determination to do his duty.

He had scarcely opened his Sophocles, before a light tap at his door brought the flush to his brow. How well he knew that firm, light knock, that always prefaced some loving ministry! But this evening what could his mother want with him? Of course he knew. Mrs. Vincent had certainly spoken!

'Come in, little mother!' he shouted, determined to put a good face on it; and Clare, with a sigh as she passed Willie's empty bed, stepped up to her boy and began to ruffle his hair with tender fingers. 'Oh, Walter!' was all she said; but the young man understood her—those slender fingers toying with his hair were eloquent enough.

'Little mother,' he said again, leaning back in his chair to receive the kiss that he knew would follow her words, 'have you come to talk to me? But you will catch cold,' for the attic was large and draughty; 'is there nowhere else?' Then, as she shook her head, he took off his ulster and wrapped it round her.

'Oh no, Walter,' trying to resist; but his

strong arms were round her, pinioning her to her seat.

‘Why, what nonsense!’ he exclaimed. ‘Do you think I am not tough enough to bear a little cold? After all, I am my father’s son.’ Then she submitted, and he sat down beside her on his bed with his arm still round her.

‘Mother!’ he said with youthful abruptness, ‘of course I know why you look so grave. Mrs. Vincent has been talking to you.’

Then Mrs. Glyn looked at him very sadly.

‘Do you think that I ought to have heard it first from her? Why have you feared to trust your mother, Walter?’

‘I have never feared, my mother,’ he returned, with an affectionate pressure.

But she drew back slightly.

‘You have feared your father, then?’

‘No, mother, not in the way you mean. As far as that goes, I fear no man;’ and even at that moment Clare thrilled with pride and tenderness. When Walter held up his head and spoke in that determined way, he looked every inch a Hamlyn. Oh, how handsome he was! ‘Goodly, and of a fair countenance.’ How she loved those old Biblical phrases!

And he was her first-born. 'The only thing I feared was to give pain to my parents,' finished the poor young fellow, with tears in his eyes.

Then Clare's maternal heart yearned over her boy.

'Yes, I know,' fondling his hand. 'Hester has told me all. Walter, I do not want to be hard with you, but I must own this has grieved me terribly. Your poor father, it will be such a blow to him! All these years the thought of your entering the priesthood has been such a joy to us both.'

'Mother,' returned Walter, springing to his feet and standing before her as she sat pale and drooping, with the old ulster falling from her shoulders, 'you must listen to me. When I was a boy—a mere lad—my father's will was law to me; I never thought resistance possible, it would have seemed to me utter rebellion. When he took me out with him, he would talk to me of his wish that I should go to Oxford and take Orders. I do not remember that he ever asked me what my own wishes were. Perhaps it was as well at that early age—for I had literally no opinion on the subject. "My father says I

am to be a clergyman"—I have said that to my school-fellows a score of times.'

'Will you not sit down, Walter? We must talk over this very quietly.'

'Yes, presently, mother; but I must be on my feet for a little, I can talk so much more easily. Now do you follow me? Do you see that it is only since I have become a man that I know what is best for me?'

'You are only nineteen now,' with a faint smile.

'True; but at nineteen one can dare to say that one's soul is one's own—not my father's, but my own soul;' and there was a trace of Horace Glyn's sternness in his son's voice. 'I speak strongly,' as she winced at this, 'because I feel strongly. As I told Mrs. Vincent, no one has a right to decide my future. I have thought over things, and I have made up my mind that I cannot take Orders. Let Willie have my chance: he has got plenty of brains. It is not my fault if my tastes and pursuits are quite different from my father's. Do you know how I hate the idea of Oxford, with its endless books, lectures, and chapels? What I want is freedom and an open-air life. There is no room for a fellow

here! Let me go away and find work : in Canada, New Zealand, Queensland — anywhere out of England.'

Then she caught his arm with a little cry. Her lip quivered so that she could hardly speak, and her 'Sit down, Walter,' came with the force of a sob.

He sat down beside her, as though the sight of her agitation subdued him.

'I will not go, if you do not wish it,' he said slowly, as though every word were wrung from him.

Then she choked back her tears :

'Yes, Walter, you shall go, though it breaks my heart to part with you! Do you think mothers do not prefer their children's happiness to their own? Don't look so down-cast, my dear. I will speak to your father—I will make him see with your eyes. I have never yet measured my will against his with success ; but this time it will be different, for it is my boy's will, not mine—and, after all, he is no tyrant.'

And then she laid her head against his shoulder and wept a little, while he caressed her and called her 'his good little mother.'

'You are not hurt with me for wanting to

go away?' he pleaded anxiously when she had recovered her calmness—they had had a little silent contest again over the ulster, but now she was wrapped in it. 'You know that I never really want to leave you: only there is no room for me here.'

'No, dear, I quite understand. Mr. Vincent's title is so true: "The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts;"' and she laughed a little hysterically. 'I know I can trust my boy, that he can be as good a Christian, as pure and true and manly, in New Zealand as here under our roof;' and then she paused and looked at him very solemnly, and the memory of that look, so sweet and penetrating, remained with him for many a long year. 'You will not disappoint me, my son?'

'No, mother, God helping me, I will not disappoint you,' was his fervent answer.

Then she rose a little stiffly and laid aside her warm covering with a smile.

'I am going to your father now,' she said as he opened the door for her. 'Do not wait up for me, I may be late; but I will try and see you again.'

'I shall not close my eyes until you come,'

was his parting assurance ; but he was wrong, and she had to rouse him from his dreams to give him his father's message.

The Vicar was still at work, but he was growing a little weary of his task. He had just been quoting Locke : ' That which has the power, or not the power to operate, is that alone which is, or is not free,' and so on ; but at his wife's entrance he laid aside his pen with a sigh of relief.

' Where have you been, Clare ?' he asked. ' The girls have gone to bed ; they could not think what had become of you.' Then, as she came forward and he saw the traces of tears on her face, he felt a sort of shock go through him. Any pain of hers touched him keenly, and as he took her cold hand in his, he said very gently : ' What is it, Clare ? Tell me what or who has grieved you.' And yet when she whispered ' Walter' he stared at her incredulously. ' Walter—our boy Walter !' and he almost laughed. Since the day he first saw him in his mother's arms, that boy had never given them a moment's uneasiness. ' He is a good lad,' he muttered, ' as good a lad as ever lived.'

' I am not going to contradict you,' she

returned, feeling almost happy as she heard this praise. 'What has happened is not Walter's fault ; he cannot fight against nature.'

Then Horace Glyn's face grew a little set and hard. His wife was not a woman to shed tears over trifles. She had something grievous to tell him, something that he must brace himself to bear.

'Will you not sit and get warm first ?' he said. And this thoughtfulness for her comfort nearly upset her.

'Oh, I shall soon be warm, you have such a nice fire. But it was terribly cold in Walter's room. I am quite ready to tell you, Horace ;' and then, without any demur, he set himself to listen.

Mrs. Glyn stated the whole matter very briefly and simply. She knew her husband well enough not to waste time by copious annotations. Most women would have interwoven their own thoughts and feelings with the narrative ; there would have been marginal references and pitiful little interjections. But Clare had had her lessons very early in her married life. Before their short honeymoon had ended, some sad story reached her ears.

The girl had been a favourite maid at the Hall, and Clare had relieved her feelings as she told the miserable tale by fierce youthful denunciations against the serpent in human guise who had tempted her poor Annie. She was on the brink of tears when she paused.

‘Is it not dreadful, Horace?’

‘Yes, dear, but the story is a very old one.’

‘But what are we to do? I cannot and will not desert that poor creature. Surely you will help me, Horace?’ gazing into her husband’s unexpressive face.

‘When you are calmer, my love, and can talk like a reasonable woman, we will see what can be done for Annie.’ And he had actually taken up his pen, and the next moment was immersed in his sermon.

It was a harsh lesson, and the young wife never forgot it. Nevertheless, when poor Annie died with her thin hand clasped in her young mistress’s, almost her last words invoked a blessing on the head of Horace Glyn.

‘But for him I should not be dying in peace,’ she gasped; ‘may God bless him for all he has done for me!’

So Clare talked about her boy with forced calmness, but as her husband listened his face became more set and stern, and when she had finished he drew a deep breath, and walked to the window, as though the room were too close for him. Clare watched him, but she did not speak again; her eyes were wet, and she clasped her hands tightly together. Presently he came back to her, and sat down in his place.

‘It is all my fault, Clare.’

‘Oh, my dear, you must not say that! Anything but that.’

‘Why must I not say what is true? Would my God humble me in this way if I had served Him more faithfully—if I had set Walter a better example—if I had walked more consistently? “The path of the just is like a shining light”—do you remember that was my first sermon, Clare? Light should attract—should warm and nourish. I have borne myself so in my daily life that my boy has been repelled by me.’

‘Horace, this is dreadful! You shall not blame yourself. My children may be proud of having such a father.’ Clare had crept closer to him, and her eyes were full of a

wife's devotion. With all his faults, he was the beloved of her heart—the man whom she delighted to honour. ‘My own darling, you shall not talk so!’ and then a softer gleam came into his eyes.

‘It is such a bitter disappointment to me, Clare.’

‘And to me, too.’

‘My dear, do you think I do not know that? Are you not a part of myself, and are not my sorrows yours? Truly, we are led in paths that we have not known. Who could have imagined that our boy—our good, dutiful son—would have brought this trouble upon us!’

‘Dear Horace, we must try not to consider it a trouble. Walter will do his duty wherever he is, and if he has no vocation——’ But here she paused, as though stricken to silence by the terrible sadness in her husband's eyes. She had seen him in these moods before, when he would morbidly exaggerate some disaster that had come upon him, and declare all things were against him; but her sympathy had never failed to cheer him. He was a man somewhat prone to depression; his very strength and force

of character seemed to lead him to greater heights and depths than weaker men. Clare understood him perfectly. She knew that his heart had been set on this thing with a tenacity of purpose that would have hewed down any obstacles. How gladly, how joyously, he had stinted himself, that Walter should go to Oxford! He had laughed almost with scorn when Clare had condoled with him on some small deprivation. Why, he had absolutely gloried in it! He would have shorn himself of every comfort for his boy's sake.

‘When Walter is ordained, he must preach his first sermon at St. Jude’s,’ he had said once to his wife. ‘I shall be ready to sing my *Nunc Dimittis* then.’

But in this he was wrong. There was no man less willing to lay aside his work; if possible, he would die in harness.

When Clare had faltered over her last sentence, he had finished it himself.

‘No vocation! That is easily said. How is a lad of that age to pronounce such a verdict on himself? Do you recollect those Divine words—“This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting”? What ordeal

has Walter set himself? Has he ever spoken to me of his reluctance? Has he ever asked me to help him? But no; he has no confidence in his father.'

'You are wrong,' replied Clare with energy; 'you are looking on the dark side. Walter is reserved—he takes after you, Horace; it is not easy for him to speak of his feelings. He is only nineteen, remember. At that age a lad will often confide in a woman. Hester has been his friend, not I; but all the same I must take his part. You will give him his way, will you not?' she went on pleadingly. 'His life must not be spoiled because we want to keep him with us, Horace. It will nearly break my heart to part with him, but we must let him go.'

Then the Vicar looked at his wife very kindly.

'Bravely spoken, my Clare! Yes, you are right; the lad shall have his will. Am I to be the arbiter of my boy's fate? Is it for me to say, "Go, work in the vineyard," when all such work is distasteful to him? But all the same'—in a dejected tone—'the crowning glory of my life has faded into nothingness.'

'What message shall I give him from you?'

But at this practical question Mr. Glyn roused himself effectually.

‘I will send him no message, Clare. Let him come to me, and we will talk it out like men.’

‘But surely you will allow me to speak a word of comfort. The poor boy is troubling sadly about us both.’

‘Then tell him that he may yoke and plough with his oxen if he will—that he may thatch his own roof, and sleep under it, since he will have no roof of my providing.’

‘I think Walter deserves a kinder message than that,’ replied his wife gently.

She had been very patient with him, but her exhausted voice gave warning that the strain on her feelings was too heavy. Then, as his keen ear noted the tremulousness, Horace Glyn obeyed the promptings of his good heart.

‘I spoke hastily, Clare. I had no right to burden you with such a message. Give my love to Walter, and tell him that I am grievously disappointed, but that he shall have his will. Let him come to me to-morrow, and we will discuss ways and means. I have laid by a few pounds to pay his fees,

and they will furnish him with an outfit. He shall not go out from his father's house a beggar. You may as well let him know this.'

Then Clare thanked him with glistening eyes, and withdrew to her boy's room to give him so welcome a message.





CHAPTER IV.

‘HAVE YOU SETTLED ANYTHING, HORACE?’

‘Life is an art in which one too often remains a mere amateur. Without spilling the heart’s blood it is impossible to become a master.’—ELIZABETH OF ROUMANIA.

GERDA heard everything from her aunt’s lips the next morning. Bessie had gone down to the school, and they two were sitting together. As she talked, Mrs. Glyn’s hands were busy with a shirt of Walter’s that needed mending, but Gerda’s work lay in her lap untouched.

‘No wonder you look tired, Aunt Clare,’ she observed presently.

‘Yes, dear, I feel utterly jaded. I do not believe I closed my eyes until morning. Even when I fell asleep I dreamt that we were at the docks. I could even hear the throbbing of the engines, and the black hull

of the vessel that was to carry him away was distinctly visible. When I told your uncle Horace so in the morning he was quite angry, and said it was nonsense.'

'Well, you see, there is nothing really settled. Walter and Uncle Horace are only talking now.'

'But all the same, your uncle is not a man to let the grass grow under his feet. If a thing has to be done, he thinks it best to do it quickly, and Walter is just as impetuous. I had a little talk with him myself this morning while we were waiting for breakfast, and it appears that there is an opening for him if he chooses to take it. Rupert Johnston, who is going out to Queensland, is a cousin of Mr. Harding's, and it appears that Walter met him at The Briars last summer. He is going to start a large sheep-farm, and he would be willing to take Walter if we could furnish the outfit and pay his passage. It seems that they had some talk together, and Walter is wild to accompany him.'

'What sort of man is Mr. Johnston?'

'A thoroughly good fellow, so Walter assures me—only he has just lost his wife and is in bad spirits ; that is why he wants to live

out of England. Another connection of Sam Harding's is going out, too ; he is rather a delicate youth, and just Walter's age : they call him " Dick," I believe—Dick Thornton.'

' It sounds rather nice.'

' If they were not the Hardings' belongings,' sighed Clare. ' Somehow, The Briars is a veritable abode of briars to me. It was Emma who induced Sam to give Horace that presentation to Christ's Hospital for Willie ; and now this Queensland scheme was first mooted at The Briars. I suppose I ought not to speak against poor Mr. Johnston—from Walter's account he seems a very pleasant man. If he were only not Sam's cousin !' And then she laughed a little over her own unreasonableness.

' There are cousins *and* cousins,' remarked Gerda oracularly, and then her conscience smote her as she remembered Gerard.

She had heard from her mother and Doris by that morning's post. Her mother's letter had been rather a melancholy effusion. Sir Godfrey had been very trying, and his long-suffering daughter had not found her life a very pleasant one.

' Gerard does not humour him sufficiently,'

she wrote ; ' but, then, young men have so little patience. I dare say he resents your treatment of him, and so he is less sweet-tempered than usual.'

Doris's voluminous epistle had been far more cheering. She owned Grand was a trifle crotchety, but no one minded it except mother. As for Gerard, he was as good as gold. Bonnie Bell was all right again, and Gerard had promised her no end of rides.

' He is really as nice as possible,' she went on, ' and he seems to like my doing things for him. Yesterday, when he was over at Harburton, I tidied the den for him, and put everything in order. You should have seen his pleased face when he put his head in at the door ; he called me a good, dear little Doey. Of course he misses you ; and at times he seems low and not quite like himself, but he tries hard not to let us see it. I want you too, dreadfully, darling—your room does look so lonely. Gerard is so good to Waif ; he lets him go out with the other dogs : and the other day I found him asleep by the hall fire, and Gerard would not let me turn him out. Even Waif is sacred in his eyes now ;

do you see that ! you hard-hearted girl ! But there, you shall not be scolded, and I am, as ever,

‘Your loving little DORRIE.’

‘Poor little soul ! how devoted she is to him !’ thought Gerda. ‘I wonder if Gerard will ever find it out. Perhaps if they are left together for a long time he will discover for himself how sweet and good she is. Doris is very simple and childish, and she is not clever ; but she has more in her than people think. Doris would go through fire and water for anyone she loved. Oh, the irony of fate !’ finished the girl as she put aside the letter. ‘If Gerard would only find it out for himself ! I am sure Doris would make him the dearest little wife in the world.’

Gerda was roused from her reverie the next moment by her uncle and Walter entering the room. Mrs. Glyn looked at them wistfully, but she asked no question.

The talk between the father and son had evidently been an agitating one. Walter looked flushed and excited as he sat down beside his mother and began to play with her reels of cotton ; but Mr. Glyn took up his usual position on the hearthrug : the cloud

upon his brow had lifted a little, and his voice insensibly softened as he addressed his wife :

‘ Well, my dear, Walter and I have had our talk.’

‘ It has been a long one, Horace.’

‘ Long ? Yes, perhaps you are right. But Walter has had to make up for past arrears,’ and as the Vicar made this dreary little joke, the young man winced slightly. ‘ If he had only shown a little moral courage, and this conversation had taken place a year ago—but it is too late to think of that now.’

‘ You are right, dear ; it is far too late to think of that.’

‘ But, all the same,’ returned Mr. Glyn quickly, ‘ it was my duty to point out to him that he has wasted my substance. Should I have provided a tutor for him if I had guessed that he would rather lead the life of a ploughman than construe Greek ? If he had only opened his mind to me, or at least to you !’ And then Mr. Glyn paused. This upbraiding was a relief to his wounded paternal feelings, but it would not be wise to indulge in it too freely.

‘ Have you settled anything, Horace ?’ asked his wife gently.

'No, my dear, not yet ; but Walter has told me all about the Queensland scheme, and as far as I can judge at present it offers decided advantages.' Then Clare shivered and clasped her hands together convulsively under her work.

'It is very far,' she faltered : 'Horace, it is the other end of the world.'

'I am afraid we must not consider that ; other parents have to part with their sons. If Walter had chosen to work with his uncle——' Then a flush crossed Clare's pale face.

'No, no ; not that,' she murmured. 'I could not see my eldest son a tradesman.'

'I think I know your ideas on this point,' returned her husband dryly. 'Walter takes after you, my dear ; he is more a Hamlyn than a Glyn.' Then Clare sighed as her quick ears detected his offended tones. 'It is always understood between us, is it not, that my family are not equal to yours?' Then Gerda quietly took up her work and left the room. When her uncle spoke in that tone it was difficult for her to keep silence.

'Do not speak in that way, Horace,'

returned his wife with tears in her eyes. 'What does your family matter to me? Can any husband or father be more honoured or obeyed than you have been? You must not be angry with me because my bringing up has been so different.' Then Mr. Glyn's stiff-necked pride relaxed a little. He had always been a little sore on this subject; but such is the contradiction of human nature, that he had no desire that either of his sons should follow in their uncle's footsteps.

'You need not fear that Sam will ever repeat his offer,' he said quietly; 'but if you are raising obstacles to this Queensland scheme, it is my duty to tell you that I can see no opening for Walter in England. I am not rich enough to send him to an agricultural college or to stock a farm for him, and engineering offers him no attraction. If he desires freedom and an open-air life, he cannot do better than join Mr. Johnston—that is,' looking at her keenly, 'if you can bring yourself to part with him.'

'I will agree to whatever he and you think best,' she replied in a low voice. Then Walter furtively squeezed her hand.

'Thank you, my dear, that is well said;

then I will tell you what I propose to do. Sam will be in town on Monday, and Walter and I will go up and have a talk with him. Perhaps we shall see Mr. Johnston, too.'

'Yes, Horace,' but she could say no more; she was only conscious that a strong warm young hand was grasping hers. She was going to lose her boy, she knew that. Well, Horace would waste no time; in a day or two it would be all settled.

'I have told Walter that he shall have all the help that I can give him,' went on the Vicar, in the tone of a man who had set himself a difficult task; 'he shall have the portion that I have been laying by for him, but he must be prudent and careful; by-and-by there will be Willie to consider;' but here he was interrupted.

'I have told father that I will repay him every farthing,' interposed Walter eagerly. 'I will not defraud Willie; he has more brains than I ever had, and he loves his books. Father,' speaking with hot impetuosity, 'what does it matter whether it be the eldest or the youngest?—Willie will not disappoint you. I think I take after my cousin Gerard,' continued the lad; 'he hated books,

too, and he only cares for sport and an open-air life. It seems to me one cannot help one's nature ; one can struggle for a time, but in the long-run one is sure to be beaten.'

'You have not struggled long, my boy ;' but the Vicar's tone was a kindly one. In spite of his pain and disappointment, it was a relief to Horace Glyn to feel that the barrier was broken down between him and Walter. The boy's reticence and utter absence of response had often chilled him. An eldest son should be his father's friend and companion, he thought ; but hitherto Walter had held himself aloof from him. Henceforth he would never misunderstand his boy again. The seal of silence had been taken off the young man's lips, and for once in his life they had talked together like friends.

'Father has been a brick !' exclaimed Walter presently, when he found himself alone with his mother. 'He was a little bit touchy about Uncle Sam just now ; but in his heart he was siding with us all the time. Mother, he was so awfully good to me ; I think I never knew anyone quite so good ! One could see how cut up he was about it

all, and when I talked about Willie going to Oxford he seemed as though he could hardly take any interest. "Willie is not my eldest son," he said; and then he checked himself and began to talk about ways and means.'

'I am glad you understand your father at last, Walter,' she said a little sadly; and then she folded up her work. 'I must go now, my dear. By-and-by we will talk about this again, and you shall tell me what I am to do for you.' And he reluctantly let her go. Clare hurried away to her own room and closed her door, and then she fell upon her knees. She wanted neither of them just now, neither her husband's bracing and support, nor her boy's affection; her wounded heart needed other comfort.

Oh, the agony of such moments, when one looks into the black abysses of some dreaded future, some threatened parting, which will be like the sundering of soul and body!

'Do mothers bring their children into the world for this?' was her inward cry, as she knelt there tearless but stricken. 'If Walter goes, who knows whether I shall see him again? I have not felt strong lately, and all these cares age one.' But who can follow

the conflicting thoughts and emotions of a strong loving nature battling with its own selfishness and striving for a painful self-mastery? When Clare rose, she was no longer weak; she would forget herself and think only of her boy. She must work for him, toil for him; there would be plenty of time to fret afterwards. The memory he must carry away with him of his mother must be a bright one, and Clare nobly acted up to her resolution. It was this mixture of sweetness and strength—of womanly softness with a high spirit—that had first won Horace Glyn's love, and which had satisfied his lofty ideal of womanhood. Her nature was in some respects larger than his; but he had taught her both by precept and example to live on the high plane of duty.

Gerda was surprised as well as relieved when she came down to luncheon and saw her looking much the same as usual, and talking to Bessie about the afternoon's employment.

'Pamela is to go with me to my district, and Bessie is to spend the afternoon at the Robertsons'. I am afraid we must leave you to your own devices, Gerda.'

‘Then I think I shall go out for a walk, Aunt Clare. What a pity Nora and Janie are not here; how they would enjoy showing me their favourite haunts! They always make me tell them stories when we are out. Do you recollect, Bessie, that horrible story of the Bogie’s Castle that I evolved out of my inner consciousness, and how the post-man coming out of the fog made Nora scream, because she said his eyes glared so—like Bogie Brummager’s?’

‘Do you always deal in the horribles, Gerda?’ returned her aunt, smiling. ‘What a good thing your uncle is not listening! He is very tyrannical, as Pamela calls it, on the subject of children’s tales. Come, Bessie, we must not waste time. Will you return thanks, Horace?’ And Clare left the room, only, as she passed Walter, her hand touched his shoulder caressingly. ‘You will walk with your father, will you not?’ she said; and he nodded.

Gerda was not sorry to be alone this afternoon. She was fond of her own company, and though she would hardly have agreed with Carlyle when he exclaimed in his dominant way, ‘A school for public speaking! I

wish we had a school for private thought,' her thoughts were full of interest.

A sort of instinct made her avoid the town. Dr. Lyall would be out on his afternoon rounds, and the idea of his crossing her path made her feel hot and shy. It was a cold, bleak afternoon, and she must walk fast to keep herself warm. She would go down by the cemetery, and turn into the Twyford Road. The neighbourhood was uninteresting, but she would be sure of not meeting anyone she knew ; and then she asked herself a little distrustfully if she were not becoming very self-conscious.

Before Gerda had gone many yards, however, she saw a lady in a long gray cloak a little way before. She was rather tall, and she walked in a quick, business-like way, as though time were precious to her. As Gerda's footsteps came up behind her she turned slightly, as though to allow her to pass, and under the close, Quakerish gray bonnet Gerda saw the dark, strong features of Hester Vincent.

'I had no idea it was you whom I was following!' she exclaimed, in a pleased tone.

'I dare say not,' returned Mrs. Vincent,

smiling ; ' the disguise—as my husband calls it—prevents all recognition. But you have no idea how I love my old gray cloak ; it has kept me warm for many a winter. I am very conservative even in clothes, Miss Meredith, and like old friends best.'

Gerda was much amused at this speech ; she thought Mrs. Vincent must be rather strong-minded. No one but a beautiful woman could afford to neglect her appearance ; and the old gray cloak and close bonnet made Hester look like some gaunt Sister of Mercy.

' When I walk with my husband I dare not wear this,' she went on ; ' but I hope you will not be ashamed to be seen with me—we seem going the same way. I want to inquire after a little pupil who is very ill. Have you any special object for your walk ?'

' Oh dear no ! I am only taking a constitutional.'

' How odd that sounds !' returned Hester, in her deep, musical voice. ' My walks are never objectless, and my one idea is to get over the ground as fast as I can. As your aunt remarked yesterday, I am a very busy woman.'

‘I suppose your school gives you a great deal of work?’

‘Yes, the school and the house and the children. Unfortunately, we are not rich people, and my establishment is not a large one. There are days when I have scarcely time to take my meals. Alick says I shall never grow fat.’

‘I think he must be sorry to see you work so hard.’

‘Alick?—well, yes. But then he knows it is my own fault. I am talking to you, Miss Meredith, as though we were old friends; but you remind me so much of your aunt. My brother was very much against my marriage—neither my husband nor I had any money—but we were very much in love, and preferred poverty to separation.’

‘I hardly think you were wrong,’ returned Gerda thoughtfully; ‘but, of course, from your brother’s point of view——’ And then she stopped rather abruptly. She must not betray his confidence; she remembered every word that he had spoken about his sister.

‘Yes, Alick was right; but all the same, if the choice were to be given me again, I should do the same thing. What is poverty,

and hard work, and disappointment, compared to the sorrow of parting with one we love? I am a bad adviser on this point. When any of my girls come to consult me, I give them the worst possible counsel. One of my old pupils came to me the other day to ask my advice. "If you love this young man," I said to her, "and he be willing to work hard, do not give him up. Marriage is not for life only—it is for eternity, and it is better for two to travel together than to go alone." When I told Alick this, he was quite angry. He said the girl was very delicate, that she was used to softness and every kind of luxury, and that she had not the right grit in her—that was how he put it; but all the same, I hold to my opinion.'

'I am rather glad to hear that. I like people to have strong opinions.'

'Well, so do I; but I could never convince Alick. He is very tenacious—in other words, obstinate. He would not give me away; he said his conscience would not allow him to do it. But do you know how good he is to us? He is educating my boys. Harry and Phil will owe everything to their uncle. No wonder I think there is no one like Alick,

and that I take his part when Pamela vexes him.'

'I suppose you see a great deal of your sister?'

But Hester shook her head.

'On the contrary, I see very little of her. Pamela has odd ideas on most subjects. She will have it that even sisters may see too much of each other; so she comes very seldom to Daintree House. She and my husband are great cronies, and, for Julius' sake, I wish she would bestow more of her company on us.'

'And yet you are her only sister?'

'Yes; but we are very unlike. The only point on which Pamela and I agree is about matrimony. Pamela endorses my opinions very strongly. She would marry Derrick Vincent to-morrow if he would ask her to do so, and share his two garrets with the utmost cheerfulness—indeed, she would be happier in doing so; but neither he nor Alick will hear of it.'

'I dare say he thinks it wiser to wait a little?'

'Yes, he vows he will bring no woman to poverty, and that he and Pamela must wait

until he can provide a decent roof to cover her. When Pamela scoffs at this worldly prudence, he quotes my example as a warning text. "Look at Hester," I have heard him say; "she was a buxom young woman thirteen years ago, and now she is a wreck. Do you think I am the sort of man to look on while my sweetheart works her pretty fingers to the bone? No, no; we will bide a wee, until I have feathered my nest."

'Dr. Lyall would call this common-sense.'

'Yes; and he thinks so highly of Derrick. When Pamela's wedding-day comes he will not refuse to give her away; but Pamela declares that that day will never come.'

'Why not?'

'Ah, why not? That is what I ask her. When Derrick makes these pretty speeches to her she never answers him at all, but now and then she will come and rage to me with tears in her eyes. She is a foolish lassie, I tell her, to get such notions into her head; but she will have it that his love is Laodicean—neither cold nor hot—that he has neither the energy nor affection to risk poverty for her sake; and she lets this distrust spoil the hap-

piness of their engagement. Derrick is to be pitied, for his lady-love leads him a life.'

'If she thinks of him in this way, would it not be better to break off her engagement? Surely want of faith in his affection is the greatest insult she can offer him.'

'You had better tell her so. I am tired of taking Derrick's part. He is honestly in love with her, and he will make her a happy woman some day. But she must not try him too much: the Vincents have strong wills. Ah, here we are at my pupil's house. I will only inquire at the door, and then we will retrace our steps. Why, there is Alick's brougham! That looks bad—he has been to see Olive once this morning. Shall you mind walking up and down for a few minutes until I join you?' and Hester, with rather a grave face, opened the heavy iron gate.

The idea of a child battling with the mighty forces of life and death made her heart ache. Alick had told her once that Ray would never grow up to be a woman, but she had not repeated those words to her husband. Hester's broad shoulders bore Julius' burdens as well as her own; if she could help it, the winds of heaven should not blow too coldly

on her beloved. Now and then she had her hours of weakness, when she longed for comfort : if she sought it vainly from the man she loved, if he offered her only light husks instead of food, she never reproached him ; she kept those firm, sweet lips closed and smothered up her pain. Julius was Julius, and she must take him as he was, and make the best of him.





CHAPTER V.

HESTER'S LITTLE PUPIL.

‘Show me what thou truly lovest, show me what thou seekest and strivest for with thy whole heart, when thou hopest to attain to true enjoyment, and thou hast thereby shown me thy life. What thou lovest is that thou livest. This very love is thy life, the root, the seat, the central-point of thy being.’—FICHTE.

GERDA walked up and down for more than ten minutes; the cold was growing intense, and a few snowflakes were powdering the roads. February was more like December that year, and weatherwise people were predicting a return of the frost; the winter promised to be long as well as severe, but Gerda seemed quite impervious to the cold and gathering dusk.

Her talk with Hester had warmed and refreshed her, and she was looking forward to their walk home.

‘ If she keep me much longer waiting the snow will overtake us ; and as I have no umbrella, that will hardly be pleasant.’ But as this thought crossed her mind she heard Mrs. Vincent’s voice behind her.

‘ Here she is, Alick !’ and Gerda turned quickly as the brother and sister hurried after her.

Dr. Lyall shook hands with her silently ; he had a grave, abstracted look, and Hester had evidently been crying.

‘ She has gone, poor little darling !’ she said huskily. ‘ Dear little Olive died an hour ago. Oh, the pity of it, Miss Meredith ! She was the only child—think of the poor father and mother !’

‘ You must not keep Miss Meredith standing in this cold, Hester ;’ and Dr. Lyall’s tone was a trifle brusque, probably because he was tired and harassed. ‘ Let me put you both into the brougham, and then I will walk on.’

‘ Alick will insist on our driving home,’ explained Hester. ‘ He says we shall have a heavy fall of snow directly, and as he has finished his work, a walk will do him good.’

‘ I could not hear of such a thing,’ returned Gerda, very decidedly. ‘ Why should

you not drive with your brother, Mrs. Vincent? But I would much rather walk.'

'Well, so would I,' observed Dr. Lyall curtly. 'So jump in, Hester! The mare wants to get to her stable, and Evans wants his tea.'

'Do you mean to say that in any case you intend to walk?' asked Gerda, a little astonished at this.

'Certainly I do; and if you do not object to my company——' But Gerda interrupted him rather hurriedly.

'Then in that case I think I will drive with your sister.'

'Certainly, that would be a more sensible proceeding;' and Dr. Lyall's tone was slightly ironical. He had got his way, as usual, and Gerda felt rather small as she seated herself beside Mrs. Vincent. She even forgot to thank him, or say good-bye, as he closed the door; but he did not seem to notice the omission. They were safe and warm, these two dear women, and the walk would do him no harm. How alarmed and shy Miss Meredith had looked as he proposed accompanying her! She reminded him of a young fawn, with her small head and great

startled eyes. He liked to see her with Hester. Hester would understand and appreciate her ; she—— He stopped himself, looked after the fast-retreating brougham, buttoned up his thick coat, and then thought of the sad scene in the room yonder.

Of what avail was all his skill and knowledge ? He could not save the child. How limited had seemed his resources ; how inadequate his weapons to repel that grisly foe, the fell disease that had carried off little Olive.

‘ Don’t look sorry, doctor.’ The child had actually gasped out those words as he bent over her. Had he looked more grave than usual ? Had his intense professional anxiety communicated itself to the little sufferer ? How he had longed to help her ! but his only part had been to stand there with his hand above the faint pulse, as the long-drawn breaths grew more laboured, until they ceased. No wonder there had been that look of care on his brow, as he had put Gerda in the brougham, and had set out on this solitary walk ; he was a man as well as a doctor, and these scenes always tried him.

‘It is too bad,’ complained Gerda, as they drove rapidly down the dark road ; ‘it is almost cruel that your brother should have this long, cold walk after his hard day’s work. But what could I do ? He allowed me no choice.’

‘And he was quite right,’ returned Hester, who was furtively wiping her eyes under cover of the darkness. ‘He managed you very cleverly. Alick always gets his way, Miss Meredith—that is what his patients say ; but they never disobey him. They like him much better than they do Dr. Brown, though Dr. Brown gives in to their whims.’

Gerda made no reply ; her thoughts were following the patient, plodding footsteps on the Twyford Road. Why had she not thanked him, or wished him good-night ? He had looked so dull and tired, and if he had refused to give her her own way it was for her good. How she would have revelled in that walk in his company ! She would never see him alone now, and there would be no possibility of enjoying one of those long, quiet talks. When the carriage stopped, she bade Mrs. Vincent good-bye in rather a subdued voice.

‘If you see Dr. Lyall, will you tell him that I was not ungrateful for his kindness?’ she said. And Hester undertook this commission very readily; but it so happened that she did not see her brother again that night.

She was cold, and she went into the studio a moment to warm herself, and forgetting for once to lay aside the obnoxious cloak.

Julius looked up from his book, and a frown contracted his brow.

‘Ah, Hester, that abominable cloak!’ he observed peevishly. ‘How many times have I begged you not to make such a scarecrow of yourself? Is there any reason why you should look a positive fright?’

Julius was in a bad humour, that was evident, and in such moods he required skilful treatment; but Hester, full of sorrow for her little pupil, was less observant than usual.

‘Never mind the cloak, dear,’ she said quickly.

Hester had never been sensitive about her appearance; her want of beauty had never troubled her. Julius had loved her in spite

of her plainness, and had found some strange fascination in her sweet dark face. In their early married life he had been very exacting on the subject of her dress ; but of late years he had grown more careless, perhaps because Ray had absorbed his attention. So Hester wore her old gowns unrebuked, and took advantage of her liberty to stint herself of everything but bare necessities.

‘ But I do mind it,’ he returned irritably. ‘ Do you think I want my wife to look like a market-woman ? If you will not buy yourself a proper mantle, I will order you one when I go up to town ;’ and Julius would have carried out this threat, and both mantle and bill would have found their way to Hester, but she interrupted him in an alarmed voice.

‘ Oh, Julius ! And my jacket is not two years old yet ! You forget, dear, you chose it for me yourself. It was not quite warm enough for such a bitter day ; but I will wear it another time. I would rather risk taking cold than have you buy another ; we could not afford to pay for it. Indeed, indeed, Julius, our balance is very low.’

Then an exclamation of annoyance came to his lips.

‘Always the same old story, Hester—money, money, nothing but money!’

‘Darling, someone must face it, and I dare not hide the truth from you ; but we will not talk of that now. Julius, dear little Olive Davidson is dead.’

‘Olive ! Do you mean that pretty little fair-haired girl who sat to me for “Little Red Riding-hood” ?’

‘Yes, dear ; is it not grievous ? I went to inquire this afternoon, and Miss Meredith accompanied me. Alick was there, and he sent us home in his brougham. She was the Davidsons’ only child, and they say the poor mother is almost distracted. Alick looked quite cut up about it. Oh, Julius,’ and here Hester’s eyes were streaming, ‘think if it were our little Ray !’ and she glanced at the couch where the child lay asleep, with her pet kitten in her arms.

She was kneeling on the rug, and as she spoke she leant a little heavily against him ; but he sprang so suddenly to his feet that she almost lost her balance.

‘What has Ray got to do with it ?’ he

exclaimed petulantly. 'Because one woman loses her child, is there any reason why that should affect us? Why do you put these miserable ideas into my head?' he continued, walking up and down the room. 'I was quite comfortable until you came—first with your everlasting bugbears of poverty and ruin, and next moment conjuring up horrors! I wish you were a little more thin-skinned yourself, and then you would know what you make me suffer with your old wives' tales.'

'Dear Julius, there is no need to excite yourself like this. I will not talk any more about little Olive. Let me take Ray up to bed; she is soundly asleep.'

But Julius' waywardness was not to be controlled.

'No, no! you shall not touch her;' and he knelt down by the couch, and kissed the thin little hand with passionate tenderness. 'Do you think I could bear her out of my sight, when you have put such an idea in my head! Of course Alick has been talking to you—he is a bird of ill omen, and croaks terribly. I think more of Dr. Brown's opinion than his, and I shall ask him to have a look at the child to-morrow.'

Hester sighed wearily. In these moods Julius required the utmost tact and patience on her part. She was cold and tired, and her depression was very great. After all, was she not Ray's mother? and had not she herself nearly died in giving her birth? It was Alick who had saved her when her own doctor had given her up. Julius had been grateful enough to him then.

'She is no worse,' she returned gently, bending over the child. 'Indeed, I think she looks better than usual—she has a nice little colour. Of course she would be warmer and more comfortable in her cot, but if you wish me to leave her——'

And then Julius veered suddenly round.

'No, no! Put her to bed. You are quite right—she looks fat and rosy in this light. I think I will go round and have a pipe with O'Brien'—a young artist who had lately settled in the neighbourhood. He had lately married, and his pretty young wife was Irish, too. They were a gay, light-hearted young couple, and their free-and-easy ways, their bare rooms and cosy suppers, their jokes and Bohemianism, just suited him 'down to the ground,' as he phrased it. 'It is a beastly

night ; but you have spoilt my evening for me,' he continued with a martyr-like air.

Hester offered no remonstrance. The O'Briens were not to her taste—she thought Ellen O'Brien was a little loud and unrefined ; but as Julius could not bear a word against his friends, she kept her opinions to herself—she only sighed again as she carried Ray upstairs. She had longed for sympathy, and, for once, she needed cheering ; but her appeal had only brought upon her a lonely evening.

'Do not be late, dear,' she said pleadingly.

But even this was not taken in good part.

'There is no need for you to sit up. I have my latch-key. Please take the child out of the draught.'

And she obeyed him meekly, but as she toiled up the stairs more than one tear fell on the child's face.

'He is so blind, he will not see,' she thought. 'I know what Alick thinks—he is always right—our darling will not be with us much longer.'

'Mammie, my face is wet,' complained Ray in drowsy remonstrance. 'Where is dad ? I have not said my prayers to him.'

'You shall say them to me instead, my

sweet. Dad has gone out ; but he kissed you when you were asleep and said good-night.'

'Dad always hears me say my prayers,' returned Ray obstinately. 'I shall not say them at all, mammie.'

'Then my little girl will be very naughty,' returned her mother calmly ; she would not contend with her suffering child.

Ray had awakened from her nap shivering and miserable, and her 'bad leg,' as she called it, was giving her pain.

'I want to be naughty!' she exclaimed defiantly. 'Dad is naughty, too. I had my new hymn to-night, but I won't say a word of it.'

'That is very sad,' returned Hester, in her quiet tones. 'I shall have to say it all by myself ;' and she actually went through the whole childish petition, while Ray listened frowningly, and the kitten licked its sides and looked at them both.

Ray was still contumacious when Hester placed her in her cot and wished her good-night ; and Hester was obliged to leave her and go downstairs and give the boys their tea. They were in a wild, rackety mood, and she had some trouble in inducing them to

do their lessons ; and it was rather a relief when they went up to bed.

Ray was very fond of her brothers, and Harry was her special favourite ; and as they raced past her door, they heard her weak, querulous tones calling to them.

‘Are you awake, Bo-peep?’—Harry’s pet name for her.

‘I never go to sleep when dad is out,’ returned Ray fretfully. ‘Dad is a naughty man to-night.’

‘Hold on, Bo-peep ; draw it mild !’ and Harry squatted down on the rug before the fire, and made a facetious face at her.

Ray gave a feeble little laugh ; the kitten was fast asleep, and she had found it dull lying in the big room staring at the fire. Her conscience was upbraiding her : if she had only said her prayers, perhaps she could have gone to sleep, too. She looked at Harry wistfully.

‘Shall I tell you a secret, Harry ?’

‘A hundred if you like, Bo-peep. What a jolly fire ! I wish I were a girl and could sleep in mother’s room, too ; it is precious cold in the garret, I can tell you. There was ice in our jug last night.’

‘How funny!’ replied Ray languidly.
‘Harry, have you said your prayers?’

‘Why, of course not, you duffer!—I mean Bo-peep. I generally wait until I get to my room.’

‘I would not say mine to mummie,’ sighed Ray. ‘I just loved to be naughty. I wanted mummie to be angry—but she only looked sorry.’

‘I call that real bad of you, Bo-peep,’ remarked Harry, with boyish severity. ‘You aren’t a nice little girl, are you? Mother feels so unhappy to-night because little Olive is dead. She has just been telling us so.’

‘Is little Olive an angel now?’ asked Ray, in an awestruck voice, and she sat up in her crib and looked at him with startled eyes.

‘Well, of course she is an angel, you know. I guess Olive said her prayers,’ he continued cunningly.

‘I want to be an angel, too, very bad,’ returned Ray, half crying. ‘Dad says angels never have bad legs. I guess I will say mine, too, Harry.’

‘Shall I fetch mother?’ he asked, with happy intuition; and Ray nodded eagerly.

‘Now go to sleep, my precious, and we

will talk about little Olive to-morrow,' whispered Hester when the child had sobbed out her little confession. She had been naughty, and God would not make naughty children into angels. Harry had said so—at least, as Harry growled a remonstrance at this misstatement, she thought he meant it. 'Shall mother stop with you a little?'

And, as Ray gave a sigh of assent, she took her seat by the cot, and for once the busy hands were idle.

In after-years the remembrance of that hour was very sweet to her. It was rarely that she got her child to herself. When Ray had fallen into a refreshing sleep, she still sat there. How quiet the house was! Her boys were dreaming blissfully upon their pillows; she could hear Phil snoring; Julius was happy with his friends: perhaps Ellen O'Brien was setting the little supper-table, while the two men smoked their pipes and watched her.

Hester's love for her husband was free from jealousy, and, to do him justice, he never gave her occasion to distrust him. Julius' volatile temperament led him into error, but he was perfectly loyal to his wife; and any

idea of flirting with a pretty woman never entered his head. Self-indulgence and indolence, and a certain recklessness in money matters, were his chief sins. In practical things he failed utterly, and his irresponsibility was turning his wife's hair gray; but, with all his faults, his heart was in its right place.

Hester's thoughts were very busy as she sat there; she was travelling in imagination over the thirteen years of her married life. What a dull, sad wedding it had been! Her brother's silent protest, as he drew back, and allowed an old friend to take his place, had chilled her in her bridal happiness. But how good Julius had been to her!

'I will be brother as well as husband,' he had said to her; but, after all, Alick had not forsaken her.

She thought over her own words to Gerda: 'If the choice were to be given me again, I should do the same thing.' Well, was that not the truth—absolute Gospel truth? Was it not the very meaning and essence of life, to toil and struggle and suffer, and do good work? Would she exchange these heights and depths, these

alternating spells of storm and calm, of rain and sunshine, for any dead-level of monotonous well-being? It is only a small narrow nature that fears everything, that sees lions in the way on every rough path. 'Life, not mere existence,' had been Hester's cry, even in her girlhood; and with all her faults it was Pamela's cry, too.

'Ah, Julius, is that you?' she exclaimed incredulously, as she heard his footsteps at a much earlier hour than usual.

'Did you think it was a burglar?' asked Julius good-humouredly, as he entered the room; but they both spake in hushed voices, because of the child. 'Have you been sitting up here?' in a tone of surprise.

'Ray was rather restless, and could not get to sleep. Have you had a pleasant evening?'

'Oh, pretty well. The O'Briens were as pleased to see me as usual, and the little woman gave us a rattling good feed—steaks and oysters. What do you think of that, Hester? But somehow I had a hankering to be at home. Is Beauty-bright pretty fit to-night?'

'Yes, dear; she is much as usual.'

‘All right, then I’ll turn in, for I am dog tired. You are not going to do any writing to-night, Hester?’

‘Oh no, certainly not;’ but Julius still kept his ground, and looked at her critically.

‘What do you think the fair Ellen said to-night? That I ought to look after you more; that you were looking thin and old—old! Did you ever hear such cheek, Hester?’

‘We do not grow younger, Julius.’

‘But, all the same, I won’t have such speeches made to me! Now I look at you, you certainly are thinner. Now, just mind this, I won’t have you getting up at cock-crow to-morrow; I think you have got a craze about work.’

‘Very well, dear; but, after all, Mrs. O’Brien is no authority.’

‘She is a sensible, good-hearted little creature, and she makes Pat a capital wife. Ah! I know what you are going to say—that she is not your sort; she is not tidy enough, and she laughs too much. But she would put you up to a wrinkle or two, old lady;’ and Julius nodded in a knowing way, as he went off to his dressing-room.

‘I wonder if I am growing old,’ thought

Hester, as she took up her well-worn Thomas à Kempis, 'and if Julius noticed that my hair is turning gray? I think he grows younger, somehow; he seems to have the secret of perpetual youth. After all, it is not how old we are, but how old we feel,' thought Hester, as she opened her book.





CHAPTER VI.

PAMELA'S DINNER-PARTY.

‘A stander-by may sometimes see more of the game than he who plays it.’—DEAN SWIFT.

SUNDAY was scarcely a day of rest at St. Jude's Vicarage; the frequent services and the schools hardly afforded a moment's leisure to the hard-worked Vicar. His only assistant was a young deacon, fresh from Oxford, with weak eyes and the zeal of an Apostle. It was understood that he had a leaning towards ritualism, and that he was not altogether in touch with his Vicar; and Clare had more than once expressed her surprise at her husband's forbearance.

‘I often wonder at your patience, Horace,’ she said, one Sunday night after supper, when Mr. Hathaway had been bristling all

over with aggressive suggestions, which the Vicar had received with good-humoured toleration.

The Rev. Simon Hathaway was a small, pale young man, and, with his closely-shorn fair hair and gleaming glasses, he had rather a limp, meek appearance ; but unfortunately his looks belied him. He was by no means meek. With this lamb-like exterior he had the roar of the lion, and at times his roar was terrible.

When Clare made her little speech, Mr. Glyn only shrugged his shoulders.

‘He is a capital worker, and he is thoroughly in earnest ; but, of course, he is young.’

‘But, all the same, he made himself very objectionable this evening. You would not allow Walter to speak to you as Mr. Hathaway did. I think you ought to rebuke him, Horace.’

‘My dear, if he had looked at your face, he would have felt himself sufficiently rebuked ; even Bessie was too much shocked to raise her eyes. I can assure you that his eloquence made no sort of impression on me.’

‘Bessie cannot bear him.’

‘That is very ungrateful of Bessie, as he seems to admire her so much. By-the-by, when I engaged him as my curate, I never intended him to become my son-in-law!’

‘Oh, Horace, what a horrible idea!’

‘Aren’t you a little inconsistent, my love? Simon—good heavens! what a name!—comes of a good stock. Are you aware that his father is Sir Richard Hathaway? and that he will be as rich as well as an aristocratic Simon one day? Think if his elder brother were to die—he has weak eyes, too; they are in the family—and Bessie were to be Lady Hathaway!’

But Clare had listened to this speech with a scornful curl of her lip; she quite understood that her husband was amusing himself at her expense, and she wisely held her peace.

Mr. Hathaway was seldom allowed to occupy his Vicar’s pulpit, but the afternoon’s catechizing was allotted to him, and on these occasions he would comport himself with a severity that struck terror into the hearts of the children.

Bessie used to carry home odd tales to her mother.

‘I never knew anyone with such a powerful voice,’ she said once. ‘You can hear him all over the church quite distinctly, however low he speaks. Do you know what little Abel Gubbins said this afternoon? Mr. Hathaway asked him such a ridiculous question—“Who were the sons of Belial?” And Abel got quite red, and stammered, “Please, sir, you and all the gentlemen who wear crosses on their ribbons.” Whatever could he mean by that? Mr. Hathaway looked so angry; he had his new stole on. He sent Abel out of the church; but all the children were tittering.’

Horace Glyn gave one of his rare laughs when he heard that anecdote. When he met Abel in the district next day, he patted his head not unkindly.

‘You are a smart lad, but you have plenty to learn yet. “It is better to slip with the foot than with the tongue,” as the old proverb says, my little man.’

And Abel blushed and hung down his head.

‘He do ask such plaguey questions,’ he muttered rebelliously. ‘I’ll be mum next toime, and maybe I won’t be kicked out of the church.’

‘No, no; you will only think before you speak, my lad; and there is a penny for you to buy marbles.’

‘He is a real noice gentleman,’ Abel confided to his mother that afternoon. ‘He ain’t like that little yellow-haired chap with specs. He give me a penny, did the Vicar. And “you are a smart lad”—that is what he said.’

‘Get out, and don’t go whittling wood over my wet floor!’ returned Mrs. Gubbins unsympathetically; but she had seven boys, and her husband was a little too frequent in his visits to the Red Lion, so perhaps there was some excuse for her.

The mothers in Hazelbeech Gardens were mostly blessed with shrill voices, and somewhat short in their tempers.

‘I can feel for them,’ Clare said once; ‘it must be such a relief under aggravating circumstances to bring a hard substance in contact with the wall. To be sure, little Tim Rogers hardly seemed to see the force of the argument; but I think’—reflectively—‘that one should practise on one’s own head first.’

Gerda went to St. Jude’s morning and evening. Bessie had told her that the Lyalls generally sat in the seat before them, and she

wondered whether Dr. Lyall would be there. In the morning Pamela was alone, but in the evening a gentleman accompanied her, whom Gerda rightly guessed to be Mr. Derrick Vincent.

She could not help glancing at him from time to time, partly because she was curious to see Pamela's *fiancé* and partly because his restlessness attracted her.

He was a very big man, and somewhat high-shouldered, and his length of limb made the restraint of the narrow pew evidently irksome to him, especially during the sermon. Pamela frowned visibly when he had changed his position for the eighth time, and gave him a warning glance; but Mr. Vincent only uncrossed his legs and settled himself afresh.

When he stood up he seemed more at his ease, and, as he held up his hymn-book to let the light fall on the page, Gerda could see his face clearly. He had large features and was certainly very plain, and his short-sight obliged him to wear eye-glasses. He looked considerably over thirty, and his big clumsy figure was a marked contrast to the tiny dark woman beside him.

‘An ill-matched pair,’ thought Gerda as

she prepared to follow Walter out of the church.

The crowd hindered her progress, and in the porch Pamela passed her with one of her quick, vivid smiles. Derrick Vincent gave Gerda an inquiring glance as he noticed the greeting. His eye-glasses were dangling ; he looked bigger than ever in his heavy Inverness cape.

‘What a time you are keeping me, Bear!’ whispered Pamela, as he joined her in the starlight.

‘I could not hurry. I was afraid of treading on people’s toes,’ he returned in a loud, good-humoured voice. ‘Who is your friend, Pam—the girl in fur with the pale, creamy complexion? She sang rather nicely, I remember.’

‘How dare you notice any young lady’s complexion when you are walking with me!’ pouted Pamela ; ‘and in church, too. I am shocked at your irreverence, sir.’

‘Oh, come now!’ he returned easily. ‘If you mention irreverence, who was it who frowned like a miniature fury just because my long legs got cramped? You should not hit a fellow when he is down, Pam. I felt like a

boa constrictor in a squirrel's cage ; for the life of me I could not sit still.'

And then he tucked her little hand under his arm and went on talking in his leisurely, kindly fashion of this thing and that until Pamela forgot her lecture and fell into the trap, and began to sparkle and smile, and to answer him playfully. And so they reached home in the best of tempers. There were times, as Pamela once told Hester, when she felt as though Derrick mesmerized her. 'He is so big and so placid, and there is so much of him altogether, mentally and physically, that I feel like a little dried-up goose beside him,' she remarked. But, unfortunately, these fits of humility were rare. Pamela was by no means inclined to undervalue herself.

Gerda was looking forward to her evening at Roadside, but she feared that Mrs. Glyn did not share her pleasure. A cloud lay upon her bright spirits, and when Gerda went in search of her at the appointed hour she was struck with her wan, weary looks.

'Oh, Aunt Clare, how tired you are! Of course the mothers' meeting, and the library afterwards, have been too much for you.'

'In that case a good dinner ought to do

me good,' returned Mrs. Glyn, trying to rouse herself. 'I wonder if Pamela will give us enough to eat.' And, as Gerda seemed rather astonished at this, she went on: 'Well, you see, you never know what mood she may be in. I always call the Roadside dinners "surprise parties." Last time your uncle Horace and Bessie and I dined there the fish had been forgotten, and there was no soup; but we feasted gaily on boiled beef and a turnover.'

'No wonder Uncle Horace does not care to go!'

'Oh, as to that, he would as soon dine off boiled beef as partake of half-a-dozen courses. It is not the *menu* that troubles him; but he hates to see Dr. Lyall annoyed. Upon my word, I have longed more than once to box Pamela's pretty little ears! I have felt a thirst for vengeance—like Mrs. Rogers, when she knocks Tim's head against the wall, only I would not do it so hard.'

'I wish Pamela could hear that.'

'Depend upon it, she will hear it some day. Come, Gerda, we must be going. What a lovely dress that is!—far too good for the occasion, you extravagant child! No won-

der you insisted on a fly this wet night. I am afraid my old black silk does not do you credit.'

'Oh, black silk always looks nice, and so do you,' returned Gerda, colouring under her aunt's admiring survey. The cream-coloured surah was a little smart, but, then, Doris had once told her that no dress suited her so well. 'You do really look like a Princess in it,' she had remarked, alluding to Sir Godfrey's pet name.

Gerda was indulging her girlish vanity at the expense of her common-sense. Her old blue velveteen would have been more suitable. Dr. Lyall seemed dazzled for a moment, when he joined them in the drawing-room. That fair white figure that had lighted on his hearth almost took away his breath. 'A poor doctor must not think of impossibilities,' he muttered, as he crossed the room to shake hands with his guests.

Gerda was not prepossessed by the appearance of the narrow entrance-hall, neither was the winding staircase and upper lobby to her taste. Pamela had evidently no domestic capabilities; those little graceful finishes that bespeak cultured taste were

totally wanting at Roadside. The drawing-room was large, but somewhat bare-looking ; two or three easy-chairs had been dragged to the edge of the hearth-rug, leaving an empty space ; books and work and papers were thrown on the big, roomy couch. 'It could all be made so much better,' thought Gerda, with the irritated feeling of seeing good material wasted. Her fingers longed to unloop and readjust the stiff draperies that hung over the window ; she would have pushed the big couch into that snug corner by the fire, and the cabinet of old china should have been moved to the other end of the room. Gerda amused herself that night settling a thousand fanciful details ; she put herself in Pamela's place. With a few pounds, a very few indeed, the room should look lovely. One of those Oriental nondescript stuffs should be fashioned into a portière ; a dozen or two yards of cretonne, a little Madras muslin, a big jar, and a palm fern, would do wonders. 'It was not a bad room, although, of course, it was old-fashioned ; but the furniture was quite nice ;' and she fell asleep in the midst of her calculations.

The drawing-room was only illumined by firelight when they entered, and a gentleman was fast asleep in one of the big easy-chairs. He started up and rubbed his eyes in an ashamed manner, when he saw the ladies.

‘I am so sorry we disturbed you, Mr. Vincent,’ observed Mrs. Glyn, laughing at his very visible embarrassment. ‘You need not look so guilty; a twilight nap is most excusable.’

‘I was reading a minute ago,’ he returned apologetically. ‘I remember the very passage; it was Thackeray’s finest, when honest Tom Newcome utters his last “Adsum.” Nothing in fiction was ever more touching. Little Nell’s death—pooh! it cannot hold a candle to it.’

‘And yet it sent you to sleep!’ in a teasing voice.

‘I was only shutting my eyes to blink the tears out of them,’ he returned. ‘I always feel such an ass when I read that. Don’t betray me to Pamela, Mrs. Glyn; she has the whip-hand over me in many ways;’ and his look and manner were so droll that Gerda could not help laughing.

Mr. Vincent was leaning against the mantelpiece, and as he heard that clear, silvery laugh, he put on his eye-glasses and looked at her benignantly. He had a pleasant voice and smile, which somewhat redeemed his plainness; and his light, prominent gray eyes were mild and intelligent.

‘I have not introduced you to my niece, Mr. Vincent.’

Then he bowed a little awkwardly, and allowed his eye-glasses to dangle again.

‘Pamela is in the lower regions,’ he remarked; ‘she has the cares of housekeeping on her mind. She gave me orders to be as entertaining as my nature permitted. Alick is out—he always is out—it is a peculiarity of doctors to prefer everyone’s house to their own. I have frequently remarked to Alick that a caravan would be more suitable; but he does not seem to see it.’

‘Mr. Vincent has very whimsical ideas, Gerda,’ observed Mrs. Glyn cheerfully. ‘He has amusing theories, but somehow his practice does not correspond with them. How are you getting on, Mr. Vincent? Have you found any pupils yet? You see, I take the liberty of an old friend.’

‘I always notice,’ returned Mr. Vincent slowly, as he took possession of a vacant seat, ‘that when anyone has anything disagreeable to say, that formula is invariably used—“I take the liberty of an old friend.” Excuse me if I shiver perceptibly ; you are too crushing, Mrs. Glyn.’

‘I am afraid I am sufficiently answered.’

Mr. Vincent regarded her with a mild, short-sighted expression.

‘“Old wood to burn ; old wine to drink ; old friends to trust ; old authors to read.” My dear lady, Alphonso of Aragon was a wise man. I accept your offer of friendship, and I do not mind telling you that I have a pupil.’

‘I am delighted to hear it !’

‘Thanks, awfully ! To be sure, he is a very small one, and he is hardly as lucrative as one could wish.’

‘Still, he may bring others. You would not mind a small brief as a commencement. I am sure Pamela must be pleased.’

‘Well, I would not allow her to be too sanguine ; it would never do to think of going into housekeeping at present. The fact is, I am afraid I shall disappoint you,

Mrs. Glyn. You are a good soul to take such interest in a poverty-stricken barrister ; but the fellow is my shoeblack, and I am teaching him to read.'

'Oh dear, oh dear !' in a disgusted voice ; and Mr. Vincent went on in the same drawling tone.

'“ Undertake some labour, that the devil may find thee always occupied,” says St. Jerome.' Then he crossed his legs, and fell into a reverie. 'I was struck with the remark ; it seemed to tally so beautifully with the lesson I learnt in childhood, when we imbibed wisdom from the pages of the immortal poet Watts — Dr. Watts. Did you learn Watts's hymns. Miss Meredith ?' And he continued melodiously :

“ And Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do.”

Beautiful sentiment ; supreme reasoning. I sent for Bob Stukes at once ; he was dirty, but it was honest grime. “Bob,” I said, “when Diabolus appears, let me be found in innocent sobriety teaching the young idea to shoot——”

'What nonsense are you talking now, Derrick ?' exclaimed a voice from the door-

way, and Pamela suddenly flashed into the firelight.

She was dressed oddly but effectively in a red silk dress with a prodigious train ; and her hair was piled in a curious fashion on the top of her head, and fastened by coral pins. Mr. Vincent rose from his chair and put on his eye-glasses again.

‘The room is a trifle warm,’ he murmured. ‘I always find one fire enough, even in winter.’

‘If you are going to be rude, Derrick, I shall not speak to you again,’ returned Pamela severely. ‘May I sit by you, Mrs. Glyn? You never say horrid things. Derrick wants his dinner ; but it is not my fault if Alick keeps us waiting. Ah, there he is at last !’ as Dr. Lyall made his appearance.

‘Dinner is ready, Pam,’ he observed, as he greeted his guests. ‘May I take you down, Mrs. Glyn? I hope we shall find something to eat,’ he remarked in an undertone. ‘When Pamela puts on that red dress, I always scent mischief.’

The dining-room looked warm and comfortable, and a couple of lamps diffused a mellow glow ; but Gerda, used to luxury,

noticed at once the absence of all floral decorations.

‘I must draw the line somewhere,’ observed Pamela cheerfully, addressing Gerda. ‘I never buy flowers. Alick adores them, and so do I; but I think it right to deny ourselves such an indulgence.’

‘I am quite sure that you will not endorse my sister’s opinion,’ replied Dr. Lyall, with a quick look at Gerda’s disconcerted face. What an unfortunate remark! and how was she to answer it? How often she had professed to Doris that she would rather go without her dinner than without flowers! ‘It is one of Pam’s unnecessary retrenchments; another time I will furnish the flowers myself.’

Dr. Lyall spoke somewhat pointedly, but he was bent on being agreeable to-night, so he decided to let this pass. The soup was excellent—so surprisingly good that he was half afraid that Rebecca did not make it—and the fish, an uncommonly fine piece of turbot, was cooked to a nicety.

‘Capital, Pamela!’ he could not refrain from saying.

But his sister only elevated her eyebrows, and went on with her conversation.

Mrs. Glyn was to venture the next remark :

‘ You should not have made company of us, my dear,’ she said in an undertone, as a tempting-looking entrée was handed to her. But no one overheard this.

‘ There is curried rabbit, if you prefer it,’ returned Pamela carelessly ; ‘ but I recommend the pigeons.’

Mrs. Glyn said no more. She noticed that their host looked a little puzzled by the need of selection. But Gerda spoke to him at that moment, and he brightened again.

What did it matter what he ate or drank, when he had her beside him—when for the first time she was breaking bread in his own house ? He could scarcely take his eyes off her to-night. Why had he ever failed to admire her ? She looked so sweet and girlish in her virginal whiteness, with those tiny pearls round her soft throat. He noticed her hand as it rested on the table ; it was thin and blue-veined, and a slight sapphire ring was on one finger. An insane longing came over him to take it in his own ; if he could only tell her what she was to him—that he must

always love her, whether she cared for him or not !

He scarcely heard what she was saying that moment. But when she laughed—for she was telling him about Abel Gubbins—he laughed, too, in an absent, meaningless way.

‘What would Sir Godfrey say?’ he was thinking at that moment. ‘A poor medical man——’ And then he gave himself a shake as though to rouse himself from this fool’s dream, and commenced carving the saddle of mutton that was put before him.

‘Mrs. Glyn would prefer turkey, Alick,’ observed Pamela demurely, and then he was awake in earnest.

Turkey, saddle of mutton, and two entrées ! Ah, he was up to the little witch now !

‘Perhaps you have game to follow, my dear?’ he remarked ironically.

Derrick was putting up his eye-glasses again. He seemed rapt in contemplation of the turkey.

‘A noble bird!’ he murmured. ‘Let us be festive.’

‘There is only a pheasant, Alick,’ returned Pamela modestly.

But Dr. Lyall made no further observation. He sat calmly when the pheasant was removed and the table was covered with sweets. The luxurious dessert provoked no further comment.

Pamela glanced under her eyelashes at him at every course. She pressed her unwilling guests to partake of every dish ; she was affable to her *fiancé* ; she patronized Gerda.

‘We cannot compete with you,’ she observed, with mock humility. ‘Those grapes are hot-house grapes, though they are not like Sir Godfrey’s ; but I hope you are not going to refuse them. Alick,’ disregarding a certain stoniness of visage which she well knew, ‘will you tempt Miss Meredith with those candied fruits ?’

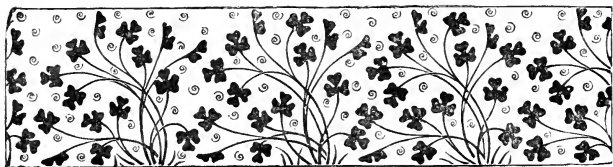
‘Some people’s grapes are sour,’ observed Mr. Vincent placidly, as he helped himself liberally. He had waxed more brilliant and cheerful at every course.

Mrs. Glyn was not in her usual spirits, and for once she was inclined to take her favourite to task. There were limits even to a joke, and this was an expensive joke ; how would poor Dr. Lyall like his weekly bill ? No, indeed, Pamela was going too far ; she would

forfeit her brother's respect ; she would lower herself in her lover's eyes.

‘ Pamela, I think the ladies are ready to go upstairs,’ observed Dr. Lyall, and Mrs. Glyn rose with a look of relief.





CHAPTER VII.

DERRICK HAS A WORD TO SAY.

‘Man tosses like a bull or crushes like a lion ; woman gnaws like a mouse or squeezes like a serpent.’—*Thoughts of a Queen.*

MRS. GLYN’S face was unusually grave as she seated herself by the fire. If a lecture were in store for Pamela, she was evidently determined that it should not be delivered that evening. Naughty Pamela glanced at her, and then began chattering to Gerda in an easy, unconcerned manner. She wished Gerda to try her new piano. Yes, it was her own ; she had actually purchased it with her very own money. She could exist without flowers, though she doted on them ; but not without a piano. ‘ Oh,’ as Gerda appeared rather surprised at this information, ‘ she had a little money—she was not quite a pauper.

Did Gerda suppose '—tossing her head—' that Alick bought her dresses? No, indeed; in that case she would have to wear old gowns and mend her gloves, as Hester did. Alick thought two new gowns a year were sufficient for any girl.'

'Do you practise much?' asked Gerda, as she willingly took her place at the instrument. She had a pretty voice, and was never reluctant to sing if people asked her.

Pamela drew a plump finger across the keys before she answered.

'Practise!—no, indeed. What an idea! Why, I hardly ever play, unless I am just in the mood, and then I never leave off. I am rather like the Piper of Hamelin in that. One night, when Alick was cross because he had a cold and wanted to go to sleep, he turned off the gas because I would not shut up the piano. But I told him I loved playing in the dark. He had a benefit that night! I was not going to be trampled on; but I punished myself as well as Alick. I got a cold, and I was so sick of my own playing that I did not touch the piano for a fortnight. Now sing something, and don't stop until I tell you.'

Gerda obeyed, and in two or three minutes Derrick Vincent's slow, heavy footfall was heard on the stairs, closely followed by Dr. Lyall's quick, springy step. Mr. Vincent stood on the threshold for a moment reconnoitring the scene ; then he sauntered towards the fireplace and sank into an easy-chair beside Mrs. Glyn.

Pamela took no notice of either of them. She was clearing the books and papers, and putting little orderly touches to the furniture. She was generally seized with a fit of tidiness at the wrong time. She had even been known to water her plants at three o'clock in the morning. 'I hate doing things just like everybody else,' she would say, and Alick would assure her in cynical fashion that she was a perfectly unique specimen.

Derrick watched her, as he lay back in his chair listening to the music. Not a movement escaped him. The swish, swish of the red silk gown seemed to blend with the song. What was Miss Meredith singing ? 'Strangers yet'—that old, old thing ! What a choice ! But women always liked sentiment. Pamela did. She was chock full of sentiment and nonsense. She was like an ill-cultivated

garden full of flowers all run to seed ; she wanted pruning and culture and skilful weeding, and a strong hand to guide her, and plenty of love and sunshine. Alick was too severe, too practical. He ought to laugh at her. He did not understand her in the least. Why, he could put him up to a wrinkle or two. He knew Pamela as no one else did—all her sweetness and her naughtiness. ‘Strangers yet!’ Indeed, nothing of the kind. He had studied her thoroughly, and he knew that when he chose to exercise his will, and put forth his strength, he was her master—the only man in the world that Pamela would ever promise to love, honour, and obey. She had been very naughty this evening. He did not intend to condone her fault in the least. She knew what he thought of her conduct—the little bright-eyed, wilful thing! That was what her fit of tidiness meant. She was afraid to look at him or to meet his eyes ; that was why she had pranked herself out in brilliant colours. She was thoroughly enjoying herself, and deferring the moment of repentance to some indefinite future.

Swish went the red gown again, past his

chair. When he had a right to issue his marital orders, he should taboo silk gowns, and all kinds of hard crinkly fabrics. She liked gowns that made no sound, that never rustled or betrayed their wearer. She was behind him now ; that horrid jingling bracelet she wore had caught in his chair-back. Jingling bracelets and chair-backs, especially chair-backs, should be sent to limbo—confiscated, put under lock and key. Another time he would have jumped up and gone to her assistance. He would have complicated matters with real or assumed awkwardness. Derrick was not a lady's man. But now Pamela was left to extricate herself, while he closed his eyes and hummed a soft accompaniment to the song.

Dr. Lyall had taken possession of a chair a little behind Gerda, and had forgotten his vexation as he listened to those bird-like notes. He was passionately fond of music, but Pamela's playing did not please him ; it was too loud, too discursive, too uneven in its rapidity. Gerda's voice was by no means perfect, but it never failed to soothe and please. There was a freshness, a pathos, a purity of intonation that always thrilled him.

‘Do not stop,’ he whispered when she had finished her first song ; ‘if you will only sing until you are tired!’ and she had smiled assent.

Once, when he turned her page, she had looked up at him, and their eyes had met. Gerda’s clear notes faltered for an instant. That moved expression on his face—that tender, half-melancholy look—what could it mean? Then a sort of inspiration seized her. He was troubled ; something, perhaps Pamela’s extravagance, vexed him. Could she not try to comfort him, to make him forget his worries? He should only remember that she was singing to him. A new sense of power came over her—a delicious consciousness that there was some silent understanding between them, that the outward world was shut out from them, that he had drawn more closely to her, and that if she turned she could see his dark head against the lamplight, as he sat there wrapped in some deep musing.

Pamela was still flitting about the room, and Derrick’s big, lazy figure was still buried in the easy-chair ; only Mrs. Glyn now and then glanced at her niece, as though some-

thing puzzled her. Why was Gerda singing like that? She seemed almost inspired to-night. No wonder Dr. Lyall was wrapped up in the music—he was so still that he might almost have fallen asleep. If she had only guessed the meaning of it—the soft brilliancy in Gerda's eyes, the suppressed emotion in Dr. Lyall's face when he at last roused himself!

‘How selfish I am! Of course you must be tired. No,’ very decidedly laying a firm hand on the music-book, ‘you shall not sing another note to-night. Do you know what pleasure you have given me? This is what I love—one song after another, no fuss, no pressing, no getting up and down from the music-stool. Indeed, I cannot thank you properly. I—I——’ getting strangely embarrassed.

‘It was a pleasure to me, too,’ returned Gerda softly. ‘It is such a little thing to do for one's friends.’

‘It is not a little thing to me’—in a tone that was new to her ear. ‘If I come to the Vicarage, will you sing to me again—just the same songs over again? You know,’ rather hurriedly, ‘I often come to the Vicarage.’

‘Do you? I am so glad! Oh yes, I will sing as much as you like, Dr. Lyall; and Bessie has a pretty voice, too.’

‘I do not want to hear Bessie. I want to hear you—only you!’ And then he drew a deep breath, and jumped up from his chair.

Pshaw! why had he said that? Good heavens! what did he mean by making such a speech? He must pull himself together; he must keep a tighter rein over himself. And then he walked up to the fire, and began talking a little incoherently to Mrs. Glyn, while Gerda collected her music with trembling fingers.

‘I do not want to hear Bessie, but only to hear you—only you!’ He had actually said those words. He had said them in a vehement undertone; but they had been distinctly audible. ‘Only you—only you!’ seemed to reverberate in her ears.

That was the crowning moment of the evening; after that nothing else happened. Dr. Lyall was called away to a patient. He passed quite close to her as he went off hurriedly, with no thought but for his patient.

Then the cab had arrived, and Mrs. Glyn had risen at once from her seat.

‘We must go now, Pamela. You must wish your brother good-night.—Come, Gerda, we will not keep the cab waiting ;’ and Gerda had been swept off without a moment’s delay.

Mr. Vincent had escorted them downstairs, and had watched them safely off the premises.

Dr. Lyall came out of his study the next moment.

‘Are they gone?’ he asked quickly. ‘I thought I heard wheels. I am called out, Derrick. Are you going to Daintree House now? Shall we walk together? I am going as far as Burlington Road.’

‘I think I will follow you ; you walk too fast for me,’ returned Derrick quietly. ‘Good-night, old man. Put up the collar of your coat ; it is a sharpish night ;’ and he went back to the drawing-room.

Pamela had turned out the lamp and closed the piano. She received him ungraciously.

‘I thought you had gone,’ she said shortly. ‘If you want to smoke, there is Alick’s study.’

‘Oh!’ remarked Derrick tranquilly, as he

took up the poker and made a mighty blaze. 'You thought I was too offended, too much upset altogether, even to bid you good-night. What a naughty little child you have been to-night, Pam! Let us have it all out ;' and here he took possession of her reluctant hands and held her before him. 'You have got to appease me as well as Alick. Now, to begin'—in a delightfully persuasive voice—'what made you invent that *menu* ?'

'I thought Alick was fussy about Miss Meredith, and wanted a good dinner,' Pamela spoke rebelliously. She would have moved away, but Derrick's strong white hands were pinioning her. She might have been a little bird fluttering in his grasp, and yet his touch was perfectly gentle, and nothing could exceed the affability of his tone. Why, then, did Pamela's cheek begin to burn. 'Let me go, Derrick! You are a rude bear to keep me a prisoner. I think we have had a delightful evening.'

'Oh, of course, a delightful evening!' echoed Derrick. 'By-the-by, did Rebecca cook the dinner ?'

'Rebecca!'—contemptuously. 'Do you suppose she could have managed all those

courses? It was Mrs. Playfair. Everyone who gives dinner-parties in Cromehurst has Mrs. Playfair. She is a little ambitious. Her *menu* was too extensive even for me. She proposed ice-pudding—fancy ice-pudding in this weather! I said, “No, we will strike that out.”’

‘Don’t you think you were wrong there, Pam? “Why spoil the ship for a ha’p’orth of tar?”—excuse the homeliness of the proverb. Ice-pudding would have struck terror into Alick’s heart; it would at once have brought him to his senses; he would have felt the justice of his punishment. Come, now, I think you failed to score one there.’

Derrick spoke in a small, wheedling voice, as though he were appeasing an infant.

‘Don’t speak to me in that tone, Derrick; I will not bear it;’ and Pamela stamped her foot. ‘Do you think I don’t understand you? You want to make me feel ashamed of myself; you want to prove to me in a round-about way that I have taken a mean revenge on Alick—that I had no right to tease and worry him.’

‘Now, what have I said to put her out like

this?' observed Derrick, apostrophizing the empty room. 'Now I come to look at you, Pam, you are quite hot and angry. Calm yourself, my child. Why, there is actually an absurd little tear on one eyelash! Ye gods of Parnassus! actually a tear!'

'You shall not enrage me,' returned Pamela, in a choked voice. 'You want to make me hate you as well as Alick; you want me to put myself in a passion, and then you will have a right to lecture me. Oh, I know your ways! You never say anything out—at first. But I will not be managed or coerced. Alick wanted a lesson, and I gave him one; and if you think I am sorry——' with a pout of defiance.

'I think Alick will be a little sorry when the bill comes in—turkey, and game, and hot-house fruit, and Mrs. Playfair. Upon my word, I don't envy Alick's feelings!'

'There again!' in an indignant tone; 'you can say that, and yet you pretend to understand me. Have I ever wronged Alick of a farthing? If I am giving him a lesson, shall I not pay for it myself—for the turkey, and the game, and Mrs. Playfair? It was a joke, a game, a little bit of spite and revenge—

it was each and everything.' But with a little sob of anger, not contrition: 'I shall have to go without a new dress in the spring to pay for it!'

Then Derrick dropped his hands, and an odd indefinable look crossed his face.

'Come and sit down, and let us talk about it comfortably,' he said kindly. 'I have a lot to say to you, and it is getting late. Now then for the old formula. Just look at me, and say, "I am awfully sorry, Bear, for having made such an absurd little goose of myself," and I will forgive you, and so shall Alick.'

'Really and truly, Derrick?'

'Really and truly, sweetheart, and amen, and so be it!'

'Well, then, I am sorry for having spoiled Alick's evening; but if you only knew how aggravating and nagging he has been all the week!'

'Alick is the best fellow in the world, and he is going to be my brother-in-law, and I will not say a word against him. If you wanted to give him a lesson, you foolish child—to heap coals of fire on his head—why did you not think of a better way—a new

carpet for his study, or an armchair, or something comfortable—instead of spending your few pennies on Mrs. Playfair and hot-house fruit ?’

‘It would have been wiser, but I thought the dinner would be such fun ;’ and here Pamela began to laugh. ‘Did you see Alick’s face when I mentioned the pheasant ? It was so deliciously stony. Oh dear !’—as a certain expression in Derrick’s eyes warned her that this was dangerous ground—‘I am getting naughty again ;’ and then she sidled up close to him. ‘Don’t say any more about it, Bear dear, and I will promise to be as good as possible to Alick.’

‘All right, then I will start another topic. Pam, do you know I really have a pupil in view ? It is not settled, but if I land him he will be a big fish.’

‘Oh, Derrick, how delightful !’

‘I shall know all about it by the day after to-morrow. Look here, little one, shall I run down in the evening and tell you all about it ? And then I can have another cut at the turkey. No fear of cold mutton and pickles—eh, Pam ?’

‘Don’t, Bear ! Do you know, I cried my-

self to sleep that night. It seemed so cruel to you, my poor dear !'

'It was a bone of contention, certainly ; but there is something else to tell you. I got ten guineas for that magazine article, and Mr. Black wants some more in the same style.'

'Oh, what good news !' and Pamela's eyes began to sparkle happily. 'You are not in debt now, Derrick ?'

'I do not owe a penny. Look here, lassie, those ten guineas shall be laid up as a nest-egg. I will not touch them. The capital is small, but still it is capital. Don't lose heart. I will have a nest for my bird some day ;' and Derrick finished his sentence in a way that was perfectly satisfactory to himself.

At this moment the latch-key was heard in the street-door below, and Pamela started up.

'That is Alick. Must I say good-night to him, Derrick ? I—I—would rather not,' looking at him, as though pleading to be let off some troublesome duty. But Derrick took no notice ; he went out in the passage, and leant over the banisters.

‘I say, old man!’

‘Hulloa! haven’t you gone yet?’ exclaimed Alick in surprise, as he took off his wet coat. ‘It is a horrid night—sleet and rain and everything abominable. Well, as you are here, you had better come down and have a pipe. Tell Pamela to go to bed.’

Derrick shook his head sadly; then he observed dolorously:

‘Oh, call my brother back to me!’

I cannot play alone.

The summer comes with flower and bee—

Where is my brother gone?’

‘Oh, shut up! and come down,’ returned Dr. Lyall, in a disgusted tone. ‘No one wants Mrs. Hemans at this time of night.’

‘He is as sweet as honey and dew combined!’ exclaimed Derrick, in an encouraging voice. ‘He is in a melting mood—boots and all. Now is your time, Pam: dry slippers, and the cup that cheers but not inebriates. Ah!’—as the red dress flashed past him—‘see the conquering heroine goes!’ and he retired discreetly.

A quarter of an hour later he entered the study. Alick was in an easy-chair by the

fire, and Pamela was in a heap on the hearth-rug at his feet, and both brother and sister seemed in high good humour.

‘I have told Alick about the pupil,’ she said brightly, ‘and you are to come down as you proposed, and Jessie Brown is to be asked too ;’ and, as Derrick tried to look pleased at this, she continued coaxingly: ‘You will not mind, will you, Derrick, because Alick wishes it so much? He says I never pay Jessie the least attention, and she always goes early.’

‘To be sure. Ask Jessie—I beg her pardon, Miss Brown—by all means. There will be the remains of Alexander’s feast. No, thanks, Alick, my boy,’ as Dr. Lyall pointed to a chair; ‘it is too late to smoke now. I must not keep Hester up;’ and Pamela jumped up to see him out.

Dr. Lyall sat a long time by his fire that night; it was evident that some important decision was weighing in the balance. He had his account-books before him; some abstruse calculation seemed to trouble him; then his brow cleared, and he threw himself back in his chair.

‘It is not so bad, after all,’ he muttered,

‘and things will improve. One would have to be careful, and work hard for some years ; but my father began on less.’ Then he paused, and his eyes glistened as he thought of his mother. She had always been a hallowed memory to him ; her fair face and calm, gentle ways would never be forgotten by her children. Something in Gerda’s voice and expression had reminded him of his mother.

‘Why should I not feel my way with her ?’ he said to himself. ‘There is no fear that I shall be interfering with another man’s rights. If she could bring herself to face a little roughness and uphill work for my sake, no one would have a right to forbid her ; but I must make her clearly understand how I am situated. Hester and her boys must not suffer. I think I am oddly constituted,’ he continued ; ‘I could enjoy no happiness if it were obtained at another person’s expense. Then there is Pamela ; she is another difficulty. I do not believe Derrick will be in a position to marry for years. Well, well ! if I make up my mind that it is right to do it—but how is a man in my position to argue the matter coolly ? I will put it all before her very plainly.

I will take no answer on the spur of the moment ; she shall not sacrifice herself without due consideration. Then there is Sir Godfrey and her mother ; but I believe she is of age. Oh, well, I will go and sleep on it ;' and he turned out his gas and went upstairs.

After all, it was Gerda who did not sleep that night, who lay in the darkness with throbbing pulses, in a tangle of sweet, confusing thoughts.

Had he meant it ? Was he a man to say anything that was not absolutely true ? ' Only you—only you ! ' The words seemed ticking in her brain ; they followed her in her dreams. ' Only you—only you ! '





CHAPTER VIII.

UNDER-CURRENTS.

‘That strange fantastic nervous organism which is the outward expression of life.’—LORD HOUGHTON.

GERDA was left to her own thoughts the next day. Mrs. Glyn and Walter had gone up to town for that consultation with Mr. Harding, and Mrs. Glyn had been unable to settle to any quiet indoor occupation.

‘I think I shall have a long morning in my district,’ she had announced at breakfast-time. ‘I did very little there yesterday.’

And though her husband spoke disparagingly of the weather, and warned her to wrap up warmly, he had not the heart to check her. ‘She will be less restless out of doors,’ he thought, as he took up his letters and carried them off to his study.

Gerda was quite contented to be alone. She wrote to her mother and Doris, and then she settled to her fancy-work. As she sat there in the gray wintry light, she seemed to weave in all kinds of sweet, subtle fancies with the flowers she was embroidering. A dim, hazy veil seemed drawn across the future. What a grand, beautiful mystery life was, after all! Where were the aches, the pains, the troubles that people lamented so loudly? What did it matter that they must come some day? Why should she meet them half-way? She was young—and was not youth the loveliest possible thing, with its wide margins, and grand perspectives, and endless distances? By - and - by the path would slope a little, the walking would be rougher. By-and-by!—oh, the sweet insouciance, the absolute faith of youth—‘by-and-by!’ To-day is ours: to-morrow—who cares about to-morrow? Only give us our ‘portion of goods’—the sweet hopes, the desires, the dreams that are our own rightful heritage, the sunny, beautiful memories that are the true background of life—and we will ask no more!

Gerda was so absorbed with these happy

musings that she was almost sorry when the door-bell rang and Pamela made her appearance : any argument or discord would jar the serenity that seemed to enwrap her.

But she need not have feared. Pamela was in an unusually subdued mood ; she sat down quietly and pulled off her gloves.

‘ I thought I would come and see how you and Mrs. Glyn were this morning. Is Mrs. Glyn out ? ’—in rather a disappointed tone. ‘ I wanted to see her particularly.’

And then Gerda explained that her aunt was spending the morning in Elmtree Road and Hazelbeech Gardens. Pamela sighed.

‘ She is a good woman, this aunt of yours. I think you take after her a little ;’ and as Gerda looked up from her work with rather a surprised expression, she continued : ‘ I wish I could sing as you do. Alick looked so happy all the time you were singing, and Derrick said you reminded him of a nestful of thrushes. Derrick is not really fond of music, and he wanted me to invest my money instead of buying a piano ; but I thought if we were always to be so dreadfully poor I must take care to provide myself with all necessary luxuries.’

‘Do you mean that Mr. Vincent is poor?’

‘Dear me, yes! he is as poor as a church mouse. You should just see his rooms—such mean little garrets! The roof is so low that when he stands up he can touch the ceiling with one hand; and the furniture is as shabby as possible. I want to give him lots of things; but Derrick is rather peculiar: he will not take a single thing from me. He was quite hurt once, when I insisted on sending him a nice reading-lamp. We had a regular quarrel about it—we do quarrel sometimes—and then he said he would keep it this once, but I must promise never to give him anything more.’

This puzzled Gerda.

‘I thought engaged people always gave each other presents,’ she observed. Pamela was talking so quietly and sensibly, her manner was so free from its usual flightiness, that she ventured to continue the subject. Pamela was quite willing to enlighten her.

‘Yes, of course it is the usual thing, and Derrick and I have exchanged rings. Don’t you like that custom, Gerda? It is not quite English, but I dare say it will become so.’

But from the first, as soon as I had accepted him, he put a veto on presents.'

'How very odd!'

'It is certainly very disagreeable of him, but his argument is this. He explained that he is a poor man, and that he cannot afford to buy me presents, as he can hardly keep himself; so it would be wrong and dishonest on his part; but as it is the man's prerogative to lavish gifts on his intended wife, he would not allow me to usurp this privilege. Of course it is a grievous mistake on Derrick's part. I should be far happier spending my money on him and Alick. Alick is almost as bad; he is as proud in his way as Derrick, so I buy dresses, and sometimes I get things for Hester.'

'I can understand how you feel about it.'

'Can you?' And Pamela brightened up visibly. 'Mrs. Glyn once told me that my two masters were too hard on me, but she is wrong. Derrick is never hard; he is always so beautifully gentle;' but her eyes filled with tears. 'It is so miserable to know that he wants things and I must not get them for him. He is so tiresome on this one point; he will tell me what books

he wants, and how difficult it is for him to go without them, and yet if I were to breathe a wish that I might get them, he would stiffen up in a moment like Alick. I am tolerably bold,' she continued, half laughing and half serious. 'I can tease Alick and play him any amount of tricks, but I dare not try it on Derrick—I dare not;' and Pamela was evidently in earnest.

'And yet he looks so very good-natured. I should feel far more afraid of Dr. Lyall.'

'You say that because you have no idea of Derrick's real character. He is good-nature itself; he is never angry or impatient like other men. Julius told me the other day that he never in his life saw him out of temper; but when he makes up his mind about anything he is as firm as a rock. Alick could not be firmer. If he thought it his duty to give me up to-morrow, he would do so, whatever it would cost us both.'

'But, Pamela dear, that sounds so terrible.'

'Yes,' and her face quivered a little. 'But if he gave me up I should never say a word. He was very near doing it once. We were talking about long engagements, and he said rather sadly that he feared that ours would

be longer than Jacob's, that he could see no opening at present, and that he often blamed himself for allowing me to engage myself to him, and so on, all in a remorseful tone ; and then he looked at me very sharply. " Yes, I have done wrong, and I would undo that wrong if I believed it would be for your happiness." '

' I hope Mr. Vincent does not often make those speeches ?'

' No, only that once ; he knows I cannot do without him. But I am often very restless and unsettled. It comes into my head sometimes that one day his conscience may be too much for him ; but there ! I am only talking nonsense, and you are encouraging me.' But from that moment Gerda understood Pamela better ; under the restlessness and the flightiness there was a loving, womanly heart. In her way, Pamela had suffered a good deal, though she would have died rather than own it to Derrick. ' I do not know what has come over me to-day !' continued Pamela, trying to laugh, but with the tears still in her eyes. ' I am in what Derrick calls a melting mood. I am not often so babyish. No, my dear,' tapping

herself playfully, 'Pamela Lyall is a many-sided creature, a sort of human octopus, with feelers in all directions—this is my soft side; I am throwing out a feeler in search of sympathy. Don't you know how a cat wants to be stroked just the right way? Well, I am in my pussy-cat mood.'

'Ah, now I recognise Pamela,' returned Gerda, smiling. 'I could not imagine who my sober-minded friend could be. But surely you are not going?'

'Oh yes; I must not sit and be stroked any longer. I have promised my big lord and master to be as nicely behaved as possible to my other master. That means, in plain English, that I must not keep Alick waiting for his luncheon. Well, you have been very good to me. I told you that we should suit each other down to the ground. Yes, that is slang, but it is so expressive. Good-bye! Give my love to madam!' And she flew off—no other word could furnish a proper notion of the nimble, bird-like motion with which Pamela skimmed over the ground.

Mrs. Glyn received Pamela's message with no special show of interest. Her thoughts were otherwise engaged. Bessie looked at

her mother wistfully, when Mrs. Glyn observed that she was going over to Coombe to see a poor old woman who had been taken ill rather suddenly.

‘It is old Betty Wilkinson,’ she remarked. ‘She is spending a week with her married daughter, and now they fear that she will never come home again.’

‘It is a long walk, Aunt Clare, and you have been out all the morning,’ remonstrated Gerda.

But Mrs. Glyn seemed bent on going. She did not invite either Gerda or Bessie to accompany her.

‘Mother is very down to-day,’ observed Bessie, as the door closed on Mrs. Glyn. ‘I am afraid she is fretting about Walter. Mother is so seldom out of spirits. What can we do, Gerda?’ To which her cousin very sensibly replied that their best plan would be to take no notice and leave her alone.

‘You and I will have a walk too, Bessie. Let us go round by Campion Hill. I am tired of work, and I believe I am restless too.’ And, as Bessie willingly agreed to this, the two girls started off for their walk.

When Mrs. Glyn came back she looked so utterly fagged and spent that Gerda insisted on her taking possession of the easy-chair, while she and Bessie waited on her. She had had a trying time, she told them. Old Betty was very ill indeed—dying, in fact—and it was hard to hear how the poor old creature longed to die at home.

‘It went to my heart to see her fretting,’ she continued, ‘so I went round by Roadside to ask Dr. Lyall if anything could be done. But he was out, so I saw Pamela, and she will give him the message. He has always been so good to old Betty. She is a dear old body, and has worked hard all her life, and he has a great respect for her.’

Now, what was there in this speech to make the colour come into Gerda's face? She was quite used to hearing Dr. Lyall's praises by this time; there was nothing new in that. She stole a furtive glance at herself as she went back to the tea-table. Her gray dress was nice, and her hair looked smooth and glossy. Perhaps it was the wind that made her face burn. But surely that was the street-door opening. Could that be Uncle Horace's footstep? But no; it was Emma announcing

Dr. Lyall. He glanced at the tea-table as he passed, but Gerda was too busy with the kettle to notice him. She scarcely looked up when he came back to shake hands with her.

‘You called at my house just now, Mrs. Glyn,’ he observed as he walked to the fireplace. ‘Pamela told me all about old Betty. We must not let the dear old woman die out there, away from her Willie, as she calls him.’

‘Is Willie that big strapping red-haired fellow who married the widow with four children?’

‘Yes, that is Willie. I fancy he rather regrets his bargain by this time. She is a very loud-voiced widow, and I should fancy her temper would match Xantippe’s. What a fool the fellow was, to be sure! He was a good-looking chap, too; he was engaged to our Rebecca once. Well, we are both soft on old Betty, Mrs. Glyn, and I will tell you what I will do. I will fetch her home myself. Tomorrow will be a slack day with me, and it will do her no harm to be moved. I mean that she will die none the quicker.’

‘Now, Dr. Lyall, I call that a real Christian act of kindness, and I am ever so much obliged

to you. Give him a good cup of tea, Gerda, and two small lumps of sugar, for he deserves it.'

'Miss Meredith has made tea for me before,' he returned as he waited for his cup. 'Do you remember the last time,' he added softly, and Gerda gave him a responsive smile.

A sudden veil of shyness had fallen over her, and she could find nothing to say. Dr. Lyall was silent, too; he drank his tea and put down his cup, and went back to the safe topic of old Betty; and if his eyes stole now and then to a certain corner, no one was the wiser—certainly not Gerda—and yet, strange to say, they were both supremely happy.

The long drive to Coombe was a small price to pay for this unexpected pleasure. Words! What are words when one is basking in the sunshine of a presence one dearly loves! Dr. Lyall was no longer cold and tired; the Vicarage drawing-room seemed to him a haven of rest. A gray gown, a fair head resting against the high-backed chair, satisfied a certain hungry longing that had troubled him all day. He could see the knitting-needles flash between her white

fingers—she looked the very image of soft repose !

‘Well, I must go !’ he exclaimed at last, with an impatient sigh. ‘I have three more patients to see before dinner.’

And then Gerda did find something to say :

‘You must be very, very tired,’ she observed as she gave him her hand.

‘I am not tired now,’ he returned quickly ; but there was meaning in his tone, and then he took himself off.

What a short visit—hardly a quarter of an hour ! and yet Gerda went up singing to her room. If she could only see him just for one short quarter of an hour every day ! It was not much she wanted—only a kindly word, a look, from this friend who was so much to her.

‘I think I should be quite happy so,’ she said to herself. But Dr. Lyall would have scorned any such notion of happiness.

‘It has come to this—that I must speak,’ he thought, as he drove back through the dark streets. ‘Am I unreasonable in my impatience ? But I want her for my own. I cannot be satisfied until I see her sitting

opposite to me day after day, and evening after evening, and know that we are never to part. Will she be surprised when I tell her this? She is very shy with me—hers is a shy, reticent nature—perhaps I may have to teach her what love is ;’ for Dr. Lyall was singularly humble-minded, and thought himself the last man to attract any woman.

Mrs. Glyn noticed nothing of this undercurrent. She was passing a miserable day of suspense ; the long delay augured no good—she was sure of that.

‘ Horace must be sifting the matter very thoroughly,’ she thought ; but she did not speak of her fears to either of the girls. ‘ We must not wait dinner,’ was all she said to Bessie. ‘ Your father is never pleased if we wait for him.’

‘ I dare say he and Walter will have dined with Uncle Sam,’ observed Bessie innocently. ‘ There is always a hot dinner from one to two.’

And then Mrs. Glyn winced slightly. Of course the shopmen had to be fed, and she knew her brother-in-law had old-fashioned patriarchal notions, and liked to preside himself. Horace had often dined in Fleet Street

—he was not as thin-skinned as his wife, and Mr. Harding had a capital housekeeper. Sometimes Willie and Nora and Janie spent a day in the City—on the ninth of November, for example—and then the most delectable puddings were served by Mrs. Golding.

Clare could eat nothing ; her nerves were all on edge, and the least sound made her shiver. The girls talked softly to each other across the table ; once Bessie laughed, and the sound jarred on her mother's ears.

‘ I think I will go to the drawing-room,’ she began, and then her husband's latch-key sounded in the lock.

She had risen from the table as she spoke, but for the moment she had no strength to go and meet them ; it was Bessie who ran out into the hall.

‘ You are so late, father !’ she heard her say ; ‘ we have quite finished dinner, but Jane is keeping the joint hot.’

‘ Tell your mother that we have dined,’ returned the Vicar. ‘ We lunched in Fleet Street ; but we had to undergo another meal later on. Send it all away, Bessie ! I am going upstairs to get rid of my mud, and then

ask your mother to come to me in the study.'

'It is all settled, Mouse,' whispered Walter in her ear; and then he, too, betook himself to his room.

He was not anxious to see his mother just yet, and was quite willing that his father should be spokesman. His pulses were beating with a young man's exhilaration and excitement. Walter was by no means selfish—on the contrary, he was very soft-hearted; but, as he said himself, 'A fellow cannot help his nature;' and love of adventure and novelty was strong within him. Just now he was wound up to such a pitch of exultation that the sight of his mother's sad face and wistful eyes would only damp him.

'Father will do it best,' he thought, as he sprang up three steps at a time to his attic; 'he will smooth matters, and tell her it is all right;' and then in his boyish exuberance he pulled off his boots and began whistling.

Clare heard him as she went to the empty study and waited for her husband.

Clare was in a painful state of tension; her over-wrought nerves gave a slight sharpness to her voice.

‘Surely you need not have been quite so long, Horace?’ she said reproachfully, as he kissed her; then he passed his hand half caressingly over her brow, as though to smooth out the furrows.

‘You have been lonely without us, I am afraid,’ he said, looking at her searchingly; ‘but, my dear, I assure you that we have not wasted a minute.’

‘And yet you have eaten two dinners!’ Then the Vicar felt that this thrust was hardly deserved.

Now and then she would speak to him sharply, but at such times he always bore himself with mildness. ‘The grand rule of married life,’ he would say to her, ‘is that a husband and wife should never be cross at the same time;’ and he generally acted up to this rule.

‘The second dinner was the most important part of the programme, my love,’ he returned pleasantly. ‘Walter was hungry, and Sam insisted on our partaking of the dinner in Fleet Street. I was obliged to agree, for Walter’s sake; but I knew all the time that we were to dine with Mr. Johnston at five—Sam had arranged it beforehand.

He said we could talk over things more comfortably.'

Then Clare said no more; she sat down by the fire, and folded her hands upon her lap. She would ask no more questions; her husband should tell her everything in his own way. But as Horace Glyn looked at his wife, he hesitated for a moment, and cleared his throat.

'Of course, we have settled everything, Clare,' he said very gently, as he seated himself beside her, and tried to take her hand; but for once it was not ready for him.

'Everything! What do you mean?' she faltered.

'I mean,' he returned quietly, 'that Walter is to go to Queensland with Mr. Johnston.'





CHAPTER IX.

‘ I CANNOT BEAR IT.’

‘ Do not complain of suffering ; it teaches you to succour others.’—CARMEN SYLVA.

‘ Suffering is sensitive and clairvoyant. Happiness has firmer nerves, but not so true an eye.’—*Ibid.*

THE blow had fallen. Ever since early morning Clare had told herself that it must come, that fate had ordained that she and her boy must part ; and yet as she heard the fatal words from her husband’s lips, her heart seemed to stand still, and, in the language of old, her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth. ‘ When ?—how long ? ’ was all she could gasp, but Mr. Glyn evaded these questions.

‘ We have been a long time,’ he returned, speaking with an attempt at cheerfulness ; ‘ but we have done the whole thing thoroughly. I went over it all with Sam first, and he was

decidedly in favour of the Queensland plan. He said Emma approved too.'

Then Clare drew herself up proudly.

'Emma!—is Emma Walter's mother?' she exclaimed bitterly. 'Does she know what a mother's heart is?' And then she collapsed miserably.

'My dear——' But he said no more. Could he break this bruised reed? Could he reprove her, when he knew that every nerve was quivering with expectant pain? Had he not better, far better, take her to his heart and tell her that he should be more to her than ten sons? But perhaps the time had not come for such comfort.

'Emma has a kind heart, and she is fond of Walter; however, we need not speak of my sister. But I was anxious to get Sam's opinion—he is sensible and far-seeing, and for good plain common-sense I would back him against any man. He tells me that he has a great respect for Mr. Johnston: that he has excellent principles, and that both Walter and Dick Thornton would be safe with him; and when I saw Johnston I decidedly endorsed this opinion. He is a very gentlemanly man—quite one of your sort, my dear—but he seems

terribly cut up at the loss of his wife. He told me everything in the most confidential way, and we got on excellently together.' And thereupon the Vicar launched into a lengthy account of ways and means—the expenses of the voyage and outfit; Walter's prospects; indeed, everything that had passed between him and Mr. Johnston, to which Clare listened passively, though she stored every word in her memory for future rumination.

'So you see we have settled every possible detail,' he finished; 'you will have to be very busy, my dear.'

'You have not told me when he is to go, Horace.'

'Well, no. I was keeping that to the last. I was afraid the shortness of the time would upset you, and I wanted you to be clear about the other things. I am sorry to say that Mr. Johnston's affairs are obliging him to hurry matters; he and Dick Thornton are to start on the second of March, and of course it will be well that Walter should accompany them. When a thing has to be done, it is better to get it over and——'

But this attempt at philosophy died away

on his lips as he saw the whiteness of his wife's face.

‘The second of March!’ she faltered; ‘that is only a fortnight. Oh, Horace, Horace! only a fortnight!’

‘A fortnight is plenty of time,’ he returned, pretending to misunderstand her. ‘Anyone can get an outfit in three or four days. I am not going to stint Walter; he shall have everything of the best. He is our eldest son, and a good lad, and deserves all we can do for him. Sam has come out very handsomely, too; he sat down and wrote out a cheque for £50 and put it in Walter’s hand. “Your aunt sent her love, and she wants you to come down to The Briars for a night; and put that in your pocket, boy”—all in his gruff way. Sam has an excellent heart.’

The Vicar was talking still with the same forced cheerfulness. The day had been a hard one, and had tried him much. But no one, not even his wife, should know what it cost him to part with this cherished boy. As for Clare, she had not heard one word. Mr. Harding’s generosity had been utterly lost on her. A growing sense of despair, of separation, of an impending trial too hard for her

motherhood to bear, was crushing her to the ground. A fortnight, only a fortnight—fourteen days and nights—and then he would leave her! Even her physical strength seemed to fail her; a sort of brain exhaustion, a faintness that numbed her with its deadly cold, was creeping over her. Instinctively she turned to the husband who had never failed her.

‘Horace, I cannot bear it—help me!’

‘My darling, you shall have all the help that I can give you,’ he assured her solemnly; and then, as though she were a child—his own little Janie or Nora—he took her in his arms and let her sob out that tearless agony on his breast.

Then, when she could bear it, he talked to her as only Horace Glyn could talk. He spoke not eloquently, but simply and tenderly of the comfort their boy had been to them, and how they had loved him. And then he showed her, who knew it all so well, how the purest love was most capable of sacrifice, how the children’s happiness is dearer to parents than their own.

‘We are growing old, my Clare,’ he said mournfully. ‘We see no longer with the

eagle eyes of youth. We no longer sweep the horizon and stretch out our pinions to the infinite. Home is everything to us, but it is not so with Walter.'

'No, Horace ; I know that.'

'Yes, but will you try to put yourself in Walter's place, and look at things with his eyes? What is Queensland to him who is the heir of all the ages? Do you suppose the ocean will scare him as it scares us, sitting in our armchairs by the fireside?'

Then a faint smile crossed Clare's wan face.

'But we are not really old, Horace. You speak as though we were aged.'

'Yes, but only by comparison with Walter. As far as that goes, I suppose I may call myself in my prime. And yet I feel battered, as though the heat and burden of the day have been very great.'

But Clare only smiled that weary smile again. It was she who was battered, she told herself—she who was worn and jaded with the battle of life, not Horace ; but she kept this thought to herself. The brief agony had passed ; she could suffer more calmly now.

A week or two later Bessie noticed a gray streak in her mother's hair, and pointed it out

to Gerda. Clare held her peace as she heard them. She knew the ravages those two terrible weeks had wrought in her. After all, there are limits. The strain on a woman's heart may be too great. 'If it had only not been Walter!' she had groaned. And yet Clare loved all her children dearly.

'There is one thing we have forgotten, love,' observed the Vicar presently, when they had talked over things a little. 'Walter wants the children to come home; you know how fond he is of Janie;' and to this Clare assented. 'And then there is Willie; I think we must have him here for a night.'

'Does Walter wish that too?'

'No. He did not mention Willie; but all the same, we must not forget him.'

Clare agreed to this, and then she rose.

'Are you going to bed?' he asked in surprise. 'Oh yes, I see it is quite late! But you must not lie down fasting; I shall bring you some wine and a few biscuits.'

'I could not eat anything; but I will take the wine. I am going to Walter now.' But he checked her.

'My dear, not to-night. You are quite unfit to talk to Walter, and it will be hard

for him as well as for you ;' but for once Clare was not docile to her husband's will.

' Oh, I must see him,' she returned piteously. ' I am not going to talk to him, but only to wish him good-night ;' and then he was obliged to let her go.

' It will go heavily with her, I fear,' he said to himself, as he went in search of the wine. But Bessie had been beforehand ; she had a little tray ready for her mother, with some sandwiches that she had cut herself. When she heard her father's step, she came out of her room in her pretty girlish wrapper and kissed him.

' Mother has gone upstairs to see Walter ; she looks very ill. Gerda said I must cut some sandwiches, because she has eaten nothing all day.'

' You are a good child, Bessie,' he returned a little shakily. Strange to say, that simple act of thoughtfulness affected him oddly. He turned away quickly, that Bessie should not see the sudden moisture in his eyes, and then he went into his dressing-room and waited for his wife. Clare did not stay long with her boy. She found him still up, and sitting on the edge of his bed in a brown

study. His whistling was over ; he looked up very gravely as his mother entered. The first glance at her face made his heart sink. What a brute he was to give her all this pain !

‘ I have come to say good-night, Walter. You must not sit there in the cold, my dear.’

‘ Oh, mother !’ Walter could say no more. Only his arms went round her with remorseful tenderness. Clare yielded to her boy’s embrace for a moment. Walter was demonstrative, like her ; he took after his mother in many ways. ‘ I am a selfish brute !’ he groaned ; ‘ I have been thinking only of myself ;’ but she would not allow him to talk in that way.

‘ You are not selfish ; you have never been selfish, darling,’ she said, smoothing back a loose lock of hair that was her especial pride. ‘ Listen to me, my dear ; I cannot talk much, I am so tired—so very tired ; but I must say one thing—your father has given his consent, and you have mine, too. You are doing quite right ; everything is right, and—and you have your mother’s blessing, my boy ;’ and then she bade him good-night.

‘ I have not been long, have I, Horace ?’

she said, as she saw her husband waiting for her at the foot of the staircase. It was a little steep, and she panted slightly. 'I did not talk to him. It is very cold up there, but Walter does not seem to feel it.'

'You are cold from utter inanition,' he said anxiously, for her haggard face frightened him. 'Come,' he continued authoritatively, 'I cannot allow you to make yourself ill ; you have to think of me as well as Walter.' And as she looked at him as though she failed to understand the drift of this, he led her to a chair and placed the food before her. No one who had seen him feeding her like a baby, with the utmost patience, would have thought Horace Glyn wanting in tenderness. Clare was too weak and dazed for any opposition ; she took what he gave her, and then lay down in her place. Only once she addressed him :

'I think you will have to pray for us both to-night, Horace. I seem to have no power to concentrate my thoughts.' And then he had knelt down beside her and had repeated a collect or two.

'You must sleep, not pray, to-night,' he told her ; and Clare turned her weary face

to the wall and fell into an exhausted sleep.

After that night he had very little trouble with her. Clare's strength and utter unselfishness helped her through that miserable time, and unless she found herself alone she never broke down.

But her gratitude for her husband's forbearance was intense.

'You were very good to me last night, Horace!' she whispered to him the next day. 'I am afraid I gave you a great deal of trouble, but I was not quite myself.'

'I am ready to take any amount of trouble,' he returned, 'if you will only avail yourself of my help.'

'Yes, dear, I know—you are goodness itself; but I shall need you more by-and-by, when Walter has gone;' and again that exquisite speech of Elkanah's came into the Vicar's mind—'Am I not better to thee than ten sons?'

Clare summoned all her energy and womanly resources to her aid. There was so much to be done, and the time was so short. Walter had his wish, and the little girls were sent home from The Briars—Mrs.

Harding's elderly parlourmaid brought them. Walter seemed unfeignedly pleased to see his little sisters. Janie, a pretty, dark-haired child, ran into his arms before she greeted her mother.

'Oh, Wally, must you—must you really go across that horrid big sea?' she exclaimed dolorously, as she flung her arms round his neck.

'I am afraid I must, Janie.'

And then it was Nora's turn. She was not so pretty as Janie, but she had a round, fresh little face, that always reminded Gerda of Doris; and, like Doris, she always followed her sister's lead.

'If I were father or mother, I would not let you go.'

'How would you stop him, Mite?' asked her mother rather sadly. The twins were commonly addressed in the family circle as Midget and Mite; Janie, indeed, refused to answer to any other name.

'Oh, it would be quite easy,' interposed Janie, nodding her head. She was a clever child and an audacious mimic, which often brought her into trouble with older people. 'I know what Mite means. I would say in

father's terrible voice, "I cannot allow it, sir. I insist on your giving up this idea." Or if I were mother, I would cry hard all day, and then Wally would be obliged to change his mind.'

'Do you think that would be kind, little one?' returned Clare gently. 'Wally is big enough to make his own plans, and father and I would not try to stop him.'

'Mother is such a brick,' interposed Walter; 'and so is father. Come and look at my new gun that Cousin Gerard sent me;' and then he went off with a little sister clinging to each hand.

The tears dropped on Clare's work, as she went on with her stitching. That picture was a lovely one to the mother's eyes. Walter would miss his sisters, she was sure of that—especially his pet Janie. The child had such endearing ways, and made such droll, amusing speeches.

When Willie came home for a night, the family circle was complete. He was a fair, delicate-looking boy, but, like Walter, he had his mother's distinguished air. All Clare's children carried themselves well, and held their heads high. Not even Willie's quaint,

mediæval costume could disguise his free, graceful gestures. Willie wore his yellow stockings grandly.

‘You must make up to father for all this disappointment, Will,’ observed Walter, as the two brothers were preparing to retire to rest. It was late, but Willie had been inspecting the contents of the new trunks, and the gun-case, and the grand tool-box, and all the other treasures that Walter had acquired during the last ten days. ‘You see, poor old dad had set his heart on sending me to Oxford, and making me a parson; but I could not do it, Will.’

‘It was precious rough on father,’ replied Willie, sticking his thumbs into his leathern belt and frowning horribly. Willie always frowned when he had a ‘big think.’ ‘If father tells me I may go to Oxford, I shall be ready with my answer—“Oxford and dad for ever!”’ And then he hitched up his coat, and vaulted neatly into the middle of Walter’s bed.

Another time he would have been soundly pommelled by his elder brother, and a pillow fight—or an ‘odds-and-ends fight,’ as Willie called it—would have been the result, all

sorts of handy articles being available as missiles ; but Walter was in a serious mood.

‘ Don’t be an ass !’ he returned shortly, and Willie at once subsided. ‘ If you are so glad to get rid of me, you can relieve your feelings on your own bed.’

Then Willie turned decidedly rusty.

‘ You are an ass yourself, to say that,’ he remarked sulkily ; and he walked off in high dudgeon, to be followed and soothed by Walter.

‘ What an idiot you are, Will ! Fancy turning off rusty at a word ! I wanted to talk to you seriously, without any foolery. But you are such a jackanapes. You see,’ putting his arm round his young brother’s neck, ‘ I want you to be awfully good to mother when I go away.’

Then Willie sniffed. He was a warm-hearted little lad, and he worshipped his big brother. He felt that only that sniff saved him from a hearty fit of crying.

‘ You need not have said that I was glad you were going,’ he grumbled.

‘ But I did not mean it, Will. I know you are awfully sorry. Look here ; I have left you all my belongings : there is the dressing-

case Uncle Sam gave me—I could not think of taking it—besides, I have that capital fitted bag ; and there are my cricket-bat and writing-case—old, but full of handy things—and my books. I told mother you should have them.'

Willie's blue eyes opened rather widely at this.

'Do you mean to say they are really mine—the cricket-bat and all? Why,' regarding him with awe, 'it sounds as though you were going to die, and had made your will.'

But Walter only laughed.

'You must not use the dressing-case until you are older, Will; it has real silver mountings. I like my bag best that father and mother and Doris gave me; but it will do for you when you go to Oxford. I am so glad you like the idea of being a parson.'

'Oh, I always meant to be one,' returned Willie nonchalantly, with his eyes fixed on the cricket-bat; 'I intend to be a rattling good one, like father, so the "dearly beloved," as Jeff calls them, had better look out. I say, Walter, am I to have your tool-box, too?'

‘Of course ! Have I not just shown you the one Aunt Emma sent me ? Now, old man, shut up, for I am getting sleepy,’ and then silence reigned in the attic.

Walter fell asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow, but Willie drew the bed-clothes over his ears and had his cry out—the tool-box, the dressing-case, even the cricket-bat failed to comfort him when he remembered that next holidays there would be no Walter.

‘It is a big shame !’ groaned Willie, with a vague idea that Fate was somehow to blame for all this. ‘I shall hate home without old Walter.’

But Willie was a Spartan, in his boyish way. He went off the next evening, looking rather glum, but without any outward lamentation—only when Walter, on the moment’s impulse, kissed the lad’s forehead, he flushed up to the roots of his hair and turned away rather abruptly.

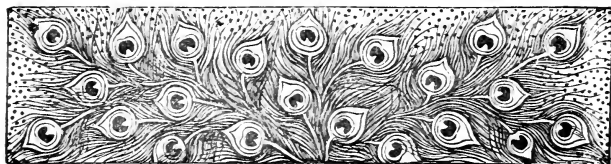
‘Good-bye, Will—don’t forget to write to me.’

‘All right !’ was the husky answer, and Willie marched off, glad that the darkness hid his face, and trying vainly to swallow the

big lump in his throat that somehow choked him when he attempted to speak.

‘Poor little chap,’ thought Walter as he walked back from the gate, and then he sat down by his mother and called Janie to have a game of cat’s-cradle with him, while Nora curled herself up on the rug, and watched them with envious eyes—the twins did so love playing cat’s-cradle with Walter.





CHAPTER X.

WALTER LEAVES HOME.

‘ I go to prove my soul !
I see my way as birds their trackless way.
I shall arrive ! What time, what circuit first,
I ask not ; but unless God sends His hail
Or blinding fireballs, sleet, or stifling snow,
In some time—His good time—I shall arrive.
He guides me and the bird. In His good time.’
ROBERT BROWNING.

DR. LYALL called several times at St. Jude’s Vicarage during that fortnight that preceded Walter’s departure. He was on intimate terms with the Vicar and his wife, and such visits were regarded by them as a matter of course ; but he never stayed long, neither did he ask Gerda to sing to him. It was felt by both that such a request would have been in bad form. He always found the ladies busy ; Mrs. Glyn would say a greeting

word, then would at once resume her needle, and the two girls would follow her example.

Dr. Lyall was perfectly satisfied with this arrangement. He liked to sit in that comfortable chair, and watch one pair of busy hands. Sometimes he would address Gerda pointedly, as though insisting on including her in the conversation, but oftener he left her alone. But Gerda never felt hurt. He always found an opportunity to say a few words before he took his leave. He would get up from his seat, and stroll to the little table where she sat rather apart from the others, and these moments were very precious to Gerda. All the world might have heard those few sentences, but the tone and the meaning could only have been interpreted by her. Once Bessie had gone out with Walter and the twins, and Mrs. Glyn had been called away to speak to a poor woman, and Dr. Lyall at once left his chair. He stood for a moment, as though examining some neckties that were on the table. Then he said abruptly : ‘ Mrs. Glyn looks very ill.’

Gerda started.

‘ Oh no, I hope not. I trust she is not really ill, but all this is so trying for her.’

‘It is certainly very trying for them both. Walter is such a bright fellow.’

‘When Aunt Clare comes back, shall I leave the room? Perhaps you could speak to her about her health. I am quite sure that she is very far from well, and she eats so little.’

‘One can see that from her face, but I do not suppose that she will consult me. She is almost as obstinate in her own way as the Vicar is in his. But perhaps I will take the liberty of an old friend to lecture her.’

‘Oh, do, please! Bessie and I will be so grateful to you.’

‘Very well, so be it. I suppose’—hesitating—‘I shall find you in the dining-room when I have finished?’

‘Oh, yes; and you shall give me your report,’ she answered demurely.

But this little ruse deceived neither of them. It would only give Dr. Lyall a good opportunity to dawdle away a few more agreeable moments. What did it matter what they talked about—the bad weather, Walter’s outfit, or Mrs. Glyn’s failing health? There was another language they talked as

well—a silent language, which both understood perfectly.

After all, Gerda's little plan wholly failed. Mrs. Glyn could not be made to take any interest in her health, and she received Dr. Lyall's friendly lecture with something like impatience.

'Gerda has asked you to talk to me,' she said, trying to laugh it off.

Dr. Lyall did not contradict her.

'They are all so anxious about you. You know you are feeling ill, Mrs. Glyn, and that you ought to consult me.'

But she shook her head. 'I think I shall quote Shakespeare to you, Dr. Lyall.'

'Of course I understand you. But there is something more than "the mind diseased." You had better let me prescribe for you. Shall I send you a sedative?'

'No, no,' she returned hurriedly. And he saw how her lips quivered. 'I do not want to sleep more than I do now. Indeed, Dr. Lyall, you are very good, but you can do nothing for me just now.'

'You will let me do nothing,' he returned lightly, but he forbore to press the point. She will not be able to do without me long,'

he said to Gerda, after he had acquainted her with his non-success. 'She is trying to brave it out, but the effort is too great for her. When Walter has really gone she will succumb, and then the Vicar will be alarmed, and send for me.'

'But can nothing be done to prevent this?'

'I think not. She is too restless and unhappy to listen to reason. And, unfortunately, we cannot treat her as we could Janie—put her to bed, and insist on her stopping there. You can only look after her, and give her some light nourishment frequently. Of course, she is not taking her meals properly, so you must supplement them as much as possible.'

'I think I shall tell Uncle Horace what you say.'

'If I were you, I should not bring the Vicar into it; he will soon see things for himself, and when he gets a notion into his head, it is not easy to turn his attention in any other direction. Look after her yourself, and see she has all possible help. I know I can trust you,' with a significant smile as he took his leave.

‘Can you let yourself out, Dr. Lyall?’

‘Why, of course I can. By-the-by,’ coming back to her, ‘when are you going to Daintree House again? Hester was talking about you this morning.’

‘She is so busy that I am afraid of troubling her; but all the same, I should like to see her.’

‘You will not trouble her; you will do her good. She has so few friends. Why not look in on her on Wednesday afternoon? she will give you some tea—and she shall give me some too,’ he added mentally.

‘I should like it of all things; but Wednesday is Walter’s last evening, and it would be so unkind to leave them.’

‘Ah, true, I forgot that. Saturday, then. I shall tell her you will see her on Saturday.’

‘I will certainly call one day,’ returned Gerda, a little confused at this persistence. With all her innocence she was not blind to Dr. Lyall’s obvious meaning. ‘He must not think I go there to meet him,’ she said to herself. But this evident reluctance, this shy withdrawal, only made her more charming in his eyes. If she had met him half-way; if she had responded too readily to his

broad hints, she would not have so wholly fascinated him.

‘I will get Hester to ask her, and then she will have no excuse, and Bessie shall come too.’ And then he went off more in love with her than ever.

Gerda carried out Dr. Lyall’s instructions most conscientiously. She took Bessie into her confidence, and Mrs. Glyn found herself waited upon and tended with a quiet consideration that insensibly soothed her. Gerda relieved her of all parish work ; she spent long uncongenial hours in Mrs. Glyn’s district, or at the mothers’ meetings.

‘I do not think the women like me,’ she observed once to the Vicar, as, one gray afternoon, she prepared to sally forth on a round of visits. ‘It is not very easy to replace Aunt Clare ; she knows exactly what to say to everyone.’

‘You are young and have much to learn,’ he returned. ‘Even in district visiting practice makes perfect. You are very good to your aunt, my dear. I hardly know what she would do without you.’

‘Oh, Uncle Horace!’ and Gerda actually blushed with pleasure. He had never spoken

to her so kindly before ; certainly he had never called her ' My dear.' He was a man who reserved all terms of endearment for his wife and children, and even to them he was sparing of soft phrases ; but now he was looking at her with a benignant expression, as though she were Bessie. How could she know that he bade God bless her as he closed the door after her ?

Poor Horace Glyn ! he was sorely troubled and perplexed just then. For the first time in their married life, he found himself solitary. Clare had simply no time to give him : her thoughts, her looks, the untiring labour of her hands, were all for her boy ; she could not bear to be absent from the room where Walter was. If her husband detained her for a moment, she seemed restless and *distracte*, and he could tell from her absent replies that she was listening for another voice. But he did not reproach her.

' Am I keeping you too long ?' he said once. ' Never mind, I will finish the business by myself ; you shall go back to Walter.'

' Can you really do without me ?' she

asked, as though ashamed of her selfishness. 'I will stay if you like, Horace; but—but I shall have so little time with him.' Then a sharp pang seemed to go through Horace Glyn's heart. It was his pain too. Did she not know that? Was not the lad his son as well as hers? But he would not hint at this; he would prove his unselfishness by leaving them together as much as possible.

'No, dear, no; I want nothing more,' he assured her, and she left the study with a look of relief.

Poor Clare! it was not strange that her husband found it a little difficult to understand her. A sad change had passed over the bright, quick-witted woman, with her maternal softness and ready sympathy. She was no longer patient and tolerant of trifles; she complained almost bitterly that she could have so little of her boy.

'There are so many to claim him,' she would sigh. Walter once told her that she was unreasonable; he, poor fellow! no longer sought his mother's sole company. In spite of her efforts she could not always summon up a smile, and the sight of her pale face was a constant reproach to him. Walter

liked to walk with his father sometimes, to have his little sisters hanging upon him. Their constant questions, their perpetual invitations to cat's-cradle, did not tease him as they teased Clare. 'Janie, you are too noisy,' she said once, rather sharply, though noise had never troubled her before. 'Why do you not send her away, Walter, and Nora too?'

'No, no, I like to have them,' he returned, as Janie clasped him close, and then he pulled her on his knee, with a whispered monition to be quiet. Nora curled herself up behind his chair like a little mouse. There was no more fun, no tugging at fair and dark locks. Was Clare any the happier, as she looked at the subdued faces? Walter had grown a little bored or sad, Janie was half-asleep, and Nora had coaxed the kitten into her lap. 'Oh, how selfish I am!' she thought. 'If I go away, they will all begin their games again;' and she actually left the room for a little. As she went upstairs, she could hear Janie shriek—the hair-pulling had recommenced. Hark! a chair had fallen—Walter was chasing the little sisters about the room. Mr. Glyn heard the sounds, even

through his study-door, and smiled benevolently.

‘He is such a lad!’ he said to himself. ‘God grant he may keep his lad’s heart for many a year.’

There was another difficulty. Clare was not always willing to be helped. She developed a strange sort of jealousy with regard to Walter’s clothes. She made it evident to Gerda and Bessie that there were certain things she wished to do herself.

‘Do not touch Walter’s socks,’ she said once, as Bessie innocently took up a pair; ‘I am going to mark them myself.’ And then she added, with unusual acerbity, ‘You are too officious, Bessie.’

It was in the evening. Mr. Glyn was sitting reading by the fire. He found his study dull, and had made some sort of excuse for lingering in the family circle. Gerda was upstairs, and Walter had retired to bid Janie and Nora good-night. They had whispered an entreaty to this effect as they had kissed him. Clare had overheard Janie, and her brow had clouded a little. Walter would be away a long time. The children were tiresome; they were too exact-

ing, Janie especially ; and then Bessie had touched the sacred pile.

Mr. Glyn looked up quickly. He saw how poor Bessie shrank back at her mother's sharp tones—she was a sensitive little soul, and a harsh word crushed her.

‘My dear!’ he remonstrated, ‘Bessie only wanted to help you.’

‘But she should wait until I ask her, Horace,’ returned Clare impatiently. ‘I want no help. I like doing Walter’s things myself.’

‘Perhaps Bessie shares this feeling,’ he replied quietly, as he took up his book again. Bessie had left the room in tears. Clare took no apparent notice. She made no reply to her husband’s remark, and he wisely forbore to say any more. Never once had he seen her lacking in tenderness to her children or himself ; never before had she so failed in patience. ‘My poor Clare!’ he sighed, and something seemed to blur the distinctness of the printed page for a moment. When Bessie came back to wish her parents good-night, she found her mother alone.

‘Walter has gone to bed,’ she said ; ‘his long walk has tired him, and your father is

writing in the study. I have finished all the socks, Bessie. Is it not a grand pile?' and then, as she saw Bessie's swollen eyes, she patted her cheek kindly. 'Oh, you foolish Mouse!' she said tenderly, 'to mind your cross old mother's grumbling.'

'I only wanted to help you,' sobbed Bessie, 'and—and Walter.'

'Oh, don't begin again, Bessie,' exclaimed Clare wearily, and then she wiped the girl's eyes with her own handkerchief; 'don't make me feel how horrid I am to everyone;' and Bessie was so shocked at this apology that her tears dried at once.

Clare tried hard to recover her self-command, but again and again her worn nerves played her false; but for her husband's forbearance and Gerda's real and efficient help, she would have broken down before ten days were over.

On the last evening she obeyed a summons to the study with unusual reluctance. 'I am afraid I cannot stay, Horace,' she began; 'could not Bessie do as well?'

'No, dear; Bessie would be no use to me. I will not detain you five minutes. I only want to speak to you about to-morrow.'

Then he felt the shiver that passed over her. 'You know Sam offered to see Walter off from the docks, but Walter would far rather that I should go.'

'Of course he would rather have his father. Surely you intend to go with him, Horace?'

'Do you mean to accompany us?' he asked abruptly.

'I?—oh no!' her face paling at the thought. 'I could not—I could not bear it.'

'Neither could I bear it for you. You have taken a weight off my mind: but, all the same, it was for you to decide, not for me.'

'And you will go with the poor boy, will you not?'

'It is my desire to do so, if you can do without me. But, my dear, it will be late; there will be no possibility of my return before morning—and how am I to leave you?'

'Oh, you must not think of me. I shall do very well. It is only Walter that we must consider.'

But he shook his head at this.

'I must consider you, too. I wish I could divide myself between you—half for you and half for Walter.'

‘ Dear Horace, you are so good to both of us ! You have been so patient with me ! Indeed—indeed I will be brave ;’ and then she kissed him and went back to her boy.

The mother and son had a long talk together that night. To Clare it was a sweet, solemn hour, and she went on the strength of it all through that night and the next day. After all, Clare carried out her intention, and Walter saw his mother’s face last with a smile on it—that soft, luminous smile that tells so much. It was the lad himself who broke down. Clare thought she heard a half-smothered entreaty for forgiveness, as though he had somehow failed in his duty by leaving her, but she would not allow him to finish.

‘ God bless you, my own ! You have done rightly, bravely. You are my dear good boy—always !’ and so she sent him away.

The Vicar involuntarily lingered for a moment ; he felt torn in two : both needed him. But Clare motioned him away impatiently.

‘ Go—go !’ she said. ‘ You must not leave him. What does it matter about me ?’ and he obeyed her reluctantly.

Clare walked back to the drawing-room

very quietly ; there was still that soft look on her face, as though she still felt her boy's eager kisses.

‘ Will you stay with Bessie and the children, Gerda ? ’ she said. ‘ I am going upstairs. I would rather be alone. ’

Gerda found her task a difficult one. Janie shed torrents of tears, and refused to be comforted, and Nora cried too, half out of sympathy.

‘ It is not right—it is cruel of Wally to leave us ! ’ exclaimed Janie rebelliously, between her sobs.

Gerda took her in her lap, and Nora nestled up to her too ; but it was a long time before Janie's grieved little heart ceased to heave so piteously. Bessie left them after a time. When she came down she told Gerda that her mother was lying down and did not wish to be disturbed. Janie began afresh when she heard this. Everything was so dismal—the house felt as though someone lay dead in it. Janie did not actually formulate this, but the sense of emptiness and desertion oppressed her childish mind. Gerda had to put her and Nora to bed at last, and to sit beside them until they fell asleep.

She told Dr. Lyall afterwards that it was very touching to see Janie with an old gray cap of Walter's hugged in her arms. Nora had begged to have the kitten.

'They are such dear children,' she finished. 'But I think Janie is my favourite, as well as Walter's: she reminds me so often of Aunt Clare.'

Mr. Glyn passed a wretched night in his big hotel bedroom. Mr. Harding, who had accompanied them to the docks, proposed that he should return with him to The Briars, but he refused.

'You are very kind, Sam; but you and Emma must excuse me to-night,' he said in a jaded tone.

'Horace is terribly cut up at parting with the lad,' observed Mr. Harding afterwards to his wife. She was sitting up for him in the snug little parlour that was called the morning-room. Mr. Harding's well-warmed slippers were on his tired feet; the remains of an excellent supper had just been cleared away; his wife sat opposite him, looking brisk and wide-awake in her handsome evening gown—she was a good-looking woman and knew how to dress herself. 'Of course I left them

together at the last. I could feel for Horace, although I have no son of my own ;' and Mr. Harding slowly puffed at his pipe.

His wife sighed. This was the one drop of bitterness in their cup—both of them had desired children, but the blessing had been denied them.

'He is a fine lad, Emma,' finished her husband mournfully — 'a fine, manly young fellow! Well, I would have given him a berth over and over again, but he turned up his nose at the Fleet Street business. It might have been "Harding and Glyn," who knows?—and Walter might have had his carriage and pair, too. But no, he preferred to tramp it in the colonies.'

'He has Clare's pride—he takes after his mother. Well, he has made his bed, and must just lie on it. When you have finished that pipe, Samuel'—Mrs. Harding never called her husband Sam—'you may as well lock up the whisky and come to bed, for you are as tired as tired can be;' and, as usual, Mr. Harding obeyed this conjugal advice.

Walter, lying in his berth, heard the groaning and the throbbing of the vast engines as they steamed into the open sea. The

rolling of the great waves was in his ears ; his mother's words seemed to blend with them : ' You are my dear good boy—always !'

And Horace Glyn, tossing uncomfortably on his soft bed, thought pitifully of the lad who had left his side to be buffeted by the cold, outside world. How willingly would he have kept him safely beside him ! but his will had not been Walter's.

' God keep him unspotted from the world,' he prayed ; and Clare, lying open-eyed in the darkness, was saying the same words over and over again—' pure and unspotted from the world ; the same good heart, the same simple, boyish nature, the same true, brave lad that he has always been—my Walter ! my Walter !'





CHAPTER XI.

DR. LYALL'S PATIENT.

‘Every man who finds himself in the wrong has learnt something.’—LORD HOUGHTON.

‘When you suffer much you see the world at a great distance, as though it lay in an immense desert. Even the voices seem to come from afar.’—CARMEN SYLVA.

WHEN Mr. Glyn returned home the next day, he found his wife still in her room. She was lying, partly dressed, upon her bed ; a sort of faintness had come over her as she was about to leave her room, so she had thought it best to lie down again. All this she explained very quietly to her husband as he sat beside her.

‘I never saw you look worse,’ he said uneasily. ‘I think I shall ask Lyall to see you.’

But Clare protested that she was not ill ; she was tired and wanted rest ; she had been

a good deal tried ; and then she begged that he would tell her about Walter.

Mr. Glyn gave her full particulars. He described the vessel and the exact position of the cabin that Walter was to share with his two friends.

‘ It is a splendid vessel ; everything is admirably arranged, and Johnston says the captain is a fine fellow. Walter will have every possible comfort, and there are some pleasant people on board—Johnston knows some of them.’

‘ And Walter ? What about Walter ? ’ asked Clare, hungry for news of her boy.

‘ Walter,’ returned her husband reluctantly : ‘ I do not know that I have much to tell you about him. He was very quiet, and followed me about everywhere when Johnston took me over the vessel. They thought it better that I should see everything ; Sam proposed it, and——’

‘ Oh, never mind Sam ! ’ with a sudden flush of annoyance. Clare’s nerves were not quite under control yet.

‘ Sam showed very proper feeling, my dear,’ returned the Vicar in a tone of reproof. ‘ He left us alone for the last quarter of an hour.’

‘Yes, yes—and what did Walter say?’

‘He said very little; only he sent his love to you and Bessie and the children. You see, it was very trying just at the last, and the poor lad was rather low—I believe I did most of the talking; and then Sam fetched me, and we had to be off in a hurry.’

Clare sighed heavily. After all, there was not much to hear, and yet she could fill in that somewhat bald description. Of course she could picture it all! Horace would not own it to her, but most likely he had been too much overwhelmed by the parting to know exactly what either of them had said.

‘It must have been bad for you, too,’ she said in a low voice; and even those few words seemed to be a solace to him. Somehow, he did not feel quite so sore-hearted as he sat there, with his wife’s soft hand in his. He had been solitary enough for the past fortnight, but now he had her to himself again. Clare’s quick eyes read something of this in his face.

‘Poor Horace! you shall not have to complain of me again;’ and then she drew his head down and told him that his hair was growing gray, and that hers was too. ‘We

are quite a Darby and Joan,' she said, with an innocent little attempt at a joke. 'I hope we shall not be very, very old when Walter——' And then she stopped and burst into tears. Oh, the weary years—the long weary years—before she could see her boy's face!

Dr. Lyall had been a true prophet, and Clare remained in the same unsatisfactory condition for days. She spoke little about her own feelings, but Gerda was sure the faintness had returned more than once, and at last she spoke to the Vicar.

'Aunt Clare is always lying down now,' she said; 'and I can see she has no strength for her duties. She allows Bessie and me to do all that there is to do.' But Mr. Glyn refused to share her anxiety.

'We must give her time to recover herself,' he said, trying to persuade himself as he spoke that there was nothing really amiss with her—he was no alarmist on matters of health. 'Walter has only been away five days, and she has been fretting after him.'

'It is not only Walter,' returned Gerda, wishing that Uncle Horace would sometimes condescend to see with other people's eyes. 'I

think if Dr. Lyall were to see her he would do her good.'

'She begged me not to send for him ; still, if you think she ought to see him—but, my dear, there is no hurry for a day or so ;' and Gerda was obliged to be content with this concession.

But before twenty-four hours were over Mr. Glyn thought fit to alter his mind. The following afternoon Clare had dragged herself from the couch, where she was hearing Janie's lessons, to help her husband with some parochial accounts, in which she had always been his able assistant, and a prolonged fainting fit had been the result.

When Gerda was summoned, she found the Vicar rubbing his wife's cold hands, and looking very frightened. 'Tell someone to go for Lyall,' he said, and then he had applied himself again to restore Clare to consciousness. Happily, Dr. Lyall met the messenger, and came at once to the Vicarage. He helped Mr. Glyn carry her to her room. When Clare had recovered sufficiently to be left to Gerda's care, he followed the Vicar into the study.

'I knew it must come to this. Why did

you not send for me before?' he said rather abruptly, as he sat down to write a prescription; 'Mrs. Glyn has been looking ill for a long time.'

'It is the parting with her boy,' began the Vicar; but Dr. Lyall cut him short. He warmly respected his Vicar, but he had his own notions of a husband's duties, and he thought the time had come to speak very plainly.

'Oh yes, she has been fretting; under the circumstances that is perfectly natural. But Walter's going has not made his mother ill.'

'What on earth do you mean, Lyall?'

'I mean that Mrs. Glyn's indisposition, or whatever you like to call it, is of long standing, and is due to other causes, and that her trouble at parting with Walter has only accelerated the mischief. Your wife is suffering from a severe form of nervous prostration; she has simply overworked herself for years.'

'Good God!' But this was no irreverence on the Vicar's part.

'I assure you I am stating the truth,' went on Dr. Lyall, who had no intention

of mincing matters. Dr. Lyall's patients, or rather their relatives, always heard the truth from him. 'You work too hard yourself to be a fair judge. As your wife's medical adviser, it is my duty to tell you that her strength and nerves have been so seriously overtaxed that I doubt if she will ever enjoy good health again.'

Mr. Glyn sat down in his big chair; he was simply stunned.

'Do you mean—do you mean——' But his tongue refused its office; he could not finish his sentence. Clare—his Clare!

Dr. Lyall hastened to reassure him.

'Oh, things are not so bad as all that! I did not mean that she is going to die; but her condition is sufficiently serious to put a veto on all work for the next twelve months. You must not think I have come to a hasty conclusion, my dear Vicar; I have had good opportunities for judging Mrs. Glyn's case, and I assure you that no woman of her temperament could go on as she has been doing ever since I have had the pleasure of knowing her.'

'She has worked hard,' replied Mr. Glyn—'we all work hard—but she never com-

plained that she felt her duties too much for her.'

'Not to you, perhaps ; she would be reluctant to add to your burdens. But to others she has implied that the day has been overfull of work—to my sister, for example, and to Miss Meredith.'

'But not to me—not to her husband, though I would have smoothed everything for her!'

'Oh, we all know that,' returned Dr. Lyall cheerily, for he was quite satisfied with the impression he had made. If the Vicar had been blind, he had now sufficiently opened his eyes. 'You only wanted me to give you a hint, which I had no chance of giving before. I shall have you to back me up when I issue my orders.'

Mr. Glyn looked at him gloomily ; the morbid side of his conscience was roused.

'But, all the same, I ought to have seen it for myself. Yes, you are right ; she has done far too much. The care of the house—we have only two servants, and there is much to do—and teaching the children, and all the outside work, and parish accounts, and——' He paused.

‘Mrs. Glyn is like Hester. She takes other people’s burdens as well as her own ; but Hester has a stronger constitution ; in spite of her hard work, I am never afraid for her. Well, I must be going. I will see Mrs. Glyn again to-morrow ; at present our task will be easy enough. She will be too weak to dispute our orders for some time to come.’ And in this prognostication Dr. Lyall was perfectly correct.

The collapse had been sudden and severe ; but the doctor’s professional insight had long expected this result. No one but Clare herself knew how excessive had been the strain on mind and body during the years of her married life.

It was not so much the change from ease and luxury to comparative poverty that had tried her ; she had had other difficulties to surmount : she had had patiently to unlearn as far as possible the traditions that had been so dear to her, and to strive to submit herself to the narrow domestic creed and robust asceticism that Horace Glyn imposed upon his household. The very effort to lift herself to his lofty standard of duty was exhausting to her free, untamed nature. Many men had high

views of duty ; but few strove so persistently to bring their daily life into harmony with such views. But Clare loved her husband too well to be content with a lower plane than his. And then, again, though the faithful wife refused to own this even to herself, Horace Glyn was a somewhat arbitrary and exacting husband. His wife must be his constant companion ; there must be no divided interest between those whom God had joined together—this is how he would have put it. In plain words, his wife's society was necessary to his full content ; he liked to have her there beside him, however busy he might be. Dr. Lyall was quite aware that Mrs. Glyn sacrificed the hours she might have devoted to needful rest, that she might stay beside her husband, and that the midnight-oil was burnt very freely at St. Jude's Vicarage.

Mr. Glyn pondered these things heavily when the doctor had left him ; he remembered with sharp pangs of remorse how white and weary Clare had often looked, and yet she had always refused to leave him. 'I am tired, but I would rather stay!'—that was how she had answered him.

He recalled a speech of the elder Gerald, which he had heard in the days of their engagement.

‘Clare is game to the backbone; she is like my black bantam cock: she will die, but she will never give in.’ Well, her cousin had been right!

Horace Glyn was taking himself to task severely, as usual. He was his own accuser, judge, jury in one. ‘Evil is wrought by want of thought, as well as want of heart,’ he muttered; ‘but as far as I have power to set things right, they shall be set right.’ And no one could doubt that he would keep his word.

Clare received her husband’s tender ministrations very passively. The active brain was clouded and torpid. She lay day after day upon her pillows, thinking of her boy or sleeping like a baby. She took whatever was given her, and was a model patient, as Dr. Lyall once told her jokingly.

But one evening, as her husband sat beside her, the heaviness of his aspect roused her benumbed faculties.

‘Horace,’ she said feebly, ‘I am not ill—not very ill, am I?’

‘No, love! Why should you ask such a question? Lyall thinks you are certainly better to-day.’

‘I am more awake, but I still feel as though the bed will not hold me. Do you know that horrible sinking feeling? But I never thought myself very ill. I wonder why you all make such a fuss over me’—trying to speak with her old sprightliness.

‘We are only carrying out Lyall’s orders. You have run down, and we are all trying to build you up again. Now you must take your medicine and go to sleep.’ And Clare willingly obeyed him.

She told Dr. Lyall the next day that she was afraid that she should sleep herself away. ‘I have a perfect passion for sleep,’ she added, with a smile.

‘I will give you leave to gratify that passion as much as you like,’ he answered, with his hand still on her pulse. ‘You have long arrears of rest to make up, and Nature is demanding her dues.’

‘But surely I ought to rouse myself?’ she asked plaintively. ‘I make no efforts to be better. My one wish is to lie still and be

quiet. I do not want even my husband to talk to me.'

'Quite right,' was the encouraging answer. 'When the Vicar begins, you must just shut your eyes, and pretend to go to sleep. He will take the hint in a moment.'

Clare's weary face brightened perceptibly.

'Do you mean that I am not to try to get well?'

'Oh, you will get well by-and-by,' he returned soothingly. 'The age of miracles is past, and slow and sure is the motto now for sick people. There must be no trying. I put my veto on that. Eat, drink, and sleep, and think as little as possible.'

'You are treating me as though I were a baby,' she complained.

But it was evident that the prescription suited her, and she mended perceptibly from that day.

Mr. Glyn thought it a most tedious convalescence. As time went on, he was obliged to leave her in Gerda's care, and go about his business. His wife's weakness and incapacity doubled his work. At times he felt almost lost without her. Bessie was too young and inexperienced to assist him, and

Gerda could not be spared from the sick-room. The girl's quiet ways suited Clare admirably—she moved about the room without fuss or noise. Dr. Lyall told her once that nursing was her undoubted forte. How Gerda blushed with delight as she heard the doctor's commendation. Mrs. Glyn's sick-room was an enchanted paradise for them both. Those daily visits, those brief conversations exchanged in the passage or on the staircase, were the chief events of Gerda's day : and to Dr. Lyall—but there is no word to express what they were to him ! Day by day the girl's sweetness pervaded his whole being, her voice lingered in his ear as he drove away from the door ; the image of a slender figure in a gray gown, with coils of fair hair, would be ever beside him. One day he would speak, and then she would know what he felt for her. Would that day come soon ?

Often of an evening Hester would steal away from her labours, and spend an hour beside her friend's couch. Pamela often came, too, but she was never admitted to the sick-room. Gerda would go down to her and pacify her with kind messages. 'No

one ever wants me but Derrick,' poor Pamela would say, with tears in her eyes. 'Hester is admitted; I dare say she is sitting with Mrs. Glyn now. What harm should I do just to kiss her, and give her these flowers?'

'She shall have your flowers, Pamela dear,' replied Gerda, gently; 'Aunt Clare does so like flowers, but you have no idea how weak she is. Mrs. Vincent does not talk to her; she is as quiet as possible. Even Janie and Nora do not see her every day.'

'Oh, you are a model nurse, as Alick says,' returned Pamela contemptuously; 'you are all in league against poor little me. Mrs. Glyn wants rousing, I am quite sure of that; such deadly quiet can do no one good. When I am ill Dr. Brown shall attend me, and not Alick, and my friends shall sit in rows along the room if they like,' and Pamela walked off in a pet. But she came again the next day, and, indeed, nearly every evening, and she always had a fresh argument, that half-amused and half-exasperated Gerda.

'I do think you love to provoke people,' she said one evening.

Pamela nodded. 'To be sure I do; contradiction is good for everybody. You were

looking as bored as possible when you came downstairs just now, so says I to myself—that is how Mrs. Muggins talks—"I will just wake the model nurse up," and now you are as lively as possible. I am going home now to experiment on the model doctor—ta-ta, my dear!" and Pamela vanished after her usual abrupt fashion. Perhaps Pamela had some ground for discontent just then. Dr. Lyall was more absent and preoccupied than usual. He found little to say when he and Pamela sat down to their frugal meal; ordinary topics did not interest him, he paid scant attention to the stream of talk that flowed from the other side of the table. Only one subject riveted his attention. Any remark on St. Jude's Vicarage, or on the Vicarage folk, seemed to rouse him effectually. Pamela soon discovered this, and she punished him by never mentioning her evening visits. 'If Alick does not choose to make me his confidante,' she thought, 'he will have no help from me; of course Hester knows everything.' But in this she did her brother injustice; Dr. Lyall was not a man to seek sympathy in his love affairs. Hester had no suspicion that his affections were so deeply engaged.

It was five weeks before Clare was carried into her husband's study, and placed on the old well-worn couch that had always been kept for her use.

Dr. Lyall had suggested that a change of scene would be beneficial to his patient by-and-by, and Mrs. Meredith had written with Sir Godfrey's consent to propose that Gerda should bring her back with her. Dr. Lyall had not tabooed this scheme; but he told the Vicar that there must be no long journey until the middle of May, and it was only the end of March now. He would have preferred himself that sea-air should have been tried first, but Clare had a hankering for her old home.

Gerda wrote to ask her mother how long she could be spared. 'I want to see you all, of course, and I have already been here nearly two months; but I greatly fear that Aunt Clare cannot spare me yet, and, indeed, I could hardly bring myself to leave her in her weak state.' But to this letter there had been as yet no reply.

As Mr. Glyn comfortably established his wife on her couch, he noticed a certain apprehensive glance at his writing-table,

which was heaped up with an accumulation of pamphlets and papers.

Clare still had a white, shrunken look, and the delicacy of her aspect was more perceptible now than ever, and yet Dr. Lyall had assured the Vicar that very morning that he was quite satisfied with the progress she was making.

‘Your table has not been tidied since I have been upstairs, Horace,’ she said, with the return of the old fretful strain in her voice.

‘No, my dear; I begged Bessie not to touch it. I have had some important papers mislaid. These young helpers are over-zealous. See, I will turn your couch, so that your eyes shall not be offended by the litter.’ And as he effected the change, he stooped over her and kissed her brow. ‘It is good to have you here again, my wife.’

‘Thank you, dear.’ And then she sighed and her face clouded. ‘Horace, what has come to me? Sit down; I must tell you something that is troubling me. I ought to be so pleased to be here in this room again, and yet——’ She paused, as though unwilling to hurt him.

‘But all the same you are not pleased.’ He spoke lightly, but oh the sharp pang at hearing her imply this!

‘No,’ she whispered, ‘I am not pleased. Is it very wrong, Horace?—but the sight of those papers oppresses me. You must have wanted me so much, my poor dear, and now—now I have no strength to do anything,’ with a little sob.

‘Do you think I do not know that?’ very tenderly. ‘Why have you feared to trust your husband, Clare? Do you forget the words I spoke nineteen years ago in Chester-ton Church—when I promised to comfort as well as to love you; to hold you in sickness as well as in health?’ Then, as she turned and clung to him, he continued solemnly, almost reproachfully: ‘Is it treating me well that you should be overburdened, and not suffer me to help you? Why did you not say to me, as we sat here together night after night, that your daily work was too heavy, and that I must relieve you of some of your tasks?’

‘I was afraid you would think me weak,’ she whispered, with tears in her voice.

‘True, but I should not have blamed you

for such weakness. How is a woman to be endued with a man's strength? At least, I should have known you well enough not to doubt your willingness. But after all, it has been my fault. If I had not been so blind I should have found out things for myself. Clare, I will have no more of this; do you know Dr. Lyall has forbidden all such work for the future?'

'He has forbidden it at present, certainly; but, Horace, I shall soon be stronger; let me go away and enjoy the sweet country air for a time, and then I shall come home refreshed.'

But Clare was not speaking the whole truth about herself. A strong foreboding told her that her power for steady, continuous work was gone. Her assumed bravery did not deceive her husband. He was far too used to dealing with human nature not to detect a certain failure of courage in her tone.

'You shall go away,' he returned firmly, 'as soon as Dr. Lyall gives you permission to go, and you shall remain under your father's roof as long as he and you please; but'—checking her attempt to speak—'I

would like you to know what arrangements I have made to relieve you in the future. I have spoken to Mrs. Vincent, and Janie and Nora shall go to her at Easter—you suggested that yourself'—apologetically, as Clare flushed with surprise; he was half afraid that he had wounded her feelings by encroaching on her maternal privileges.

'Oh, Horace, that will be such a relief! Janie is so clever that she will soon be beyond me.'

'I thought I was carrying out your wishes, my dear. Then Mrs. Bowdler has offered to take your district. Dr. Lyall says there must be no going out in bad weather, and irregularity in district visiting never answers.'

'I shall be sorry to give it up,' returned Clare rather sadly; 'but I feel you are right.' And then she added more cheerfully, 'If I have no district and no children's lessons, I can easily do the rest.'

'We will leave that question for the present, until you are stronger. Mrs. Stewart has promised to take the Bible class and the mothers' meetings for six months—that is the time we arranged, but she would be willing to carry them on even longer.'

Clare was silent, but her heart swelled with thankfulness. Now, indeed, her husband was a tower of strength to her.

‘Have I done right? Is it all as you wish?’ he asked, a little troubled at her silence. But when he saw her face he felt he had no need to ask such a question—the lovely look with which Clare thanked him was a sufficient answer.





CHAPTER XII.

‘ I AM A POOR MAN.’

‘ The year’s at the spring,
And day’s at the morn,
Morning’s at seven,
The hillside’s dew-pearled ;
The lark’s on the wing,
The snail’s on the thorn,
God’s in His heaven—
All’s right with the world.’

ROBERT BROWNING.

‘ You live but once, so make the best use of your time.’

EURIPIDES.

Two or three days after this conversation had passed between the wife and husband, Gerda set out early one afternoon to visit a poor family who had lately been in great trouble. At one time they had been in Mrs. Glyn’s district, but the man had found work in another parish, and his wife, an honest respectable woman, had been compelled to break up her little home. She was one of

Mrs. Glyn's special favourites, and she had begged Gerda more than once to walk over to Comberley and see how poor Molly was faring.

'I have been thinking of her so much since I have been ill,' she said once. 'I am a happy woman compared to Molly. How much better it is to part with one's children than to have one's heart broken by their misconduct! Molly will never lift up her head again now Joe has been in prison. He has been a ne'er-do-well all his life.'

Gerda had promised to see Molly as soon as possible, but the opportunity had not come until now. It was a good three miles' walk to Comberley, and she had been unwilling to leave the invalid for a whole afternoon. Bessie was engaged with her studies and the care of the little girls, and the Vicar was engrossed with parish work. Mrs. Glyn grew restive at last—a good sign, as her doctor informed her. She began to assert herself, and to contradict her nurse.

'I am quite well enough to be left for a couple of hours,' she said that morning. 'You are looking a little pale, Gerda, and I am quite sure that a walk this fine afternoon will do you good.'

Gerda hesitated. She longed for the walk, but she was not quite sure that she ought to desert her post.

‘Uncle Horace is going up to town,’ she objected.

‘Yes, but he will be back by five—he told me so himself—and Bessie and the children will not leave until four.’ For a little friend of the twins had invited the three to a birthday party.

Gerda was very willing to be persuaded. It was a fine afternoon in March. The sky was blue and cloudless, and there was a pleasant briskness in the air. Gerda admired the soft budding green of the hedgerows. ‘I suppose the primroses are out in the Park,’ she thought, as she paused to listen to a thrush’s song ; but she sighed a little heavily as she resumed her walk.

All these weeks Gerda had been leading a dual existence. She had nursed her aunt with a devotion that had earned the Vicar’s warmest gratitude. Her duties had seemingly engrossed her. But her real life, the absorbing interest that had made each day a joy to her, had been those few minutes when the quiet, keen-eyed doctor had stood beside his

patient and had given the demure nurse his orders. How little he had said that was not strictly professional—a remark about the fineness of the weather, an inquiry whether they had heard from Walter, perhaps a message from Pamela. And yet those visits had been stores of comfort to Gerda. There was always something fresh to muse over. Perhaps he had looked kindly at her, he had praised the arrangement of the flowers, he had glanced round the room approvingly; once he told Mrs. Glyn in her presence that she had a model nurse, and then he had looked across at Gerda with that quick smile of his that always made her heart beat faster.

She did not dare acknowledge, even to herself, how she dreaded the cessation of those daily visits. Dr. Lyall had hinted more than once that his patient would soon do without him. The day before he had announced rather abruptly that he should probably omit the morning visit. Gerda had not ventured to answer, for fear her disappointment should be perceptible. She had awakened that morning with a blank feeling—nothing was going to happen—the day somehow had lost its brightness and meaning. But

this was not her only trouble. That very morning she had received letters from her mother and Doris, urging her immediate return.

‘Two whole months before your aunt Clare can come to us!’ wrote Mrs. Meredith. ‘My dear child, surely you do not propose staying away from your home all that time; your aunt Clare is far too unselfish to ask such a thing. Why cannot your uncle Horace bring her himself; or if that be impossible, Bessie could be spared; even Gerard might offer to escort her. Gerard is going up to town on Saturday; he has turned suddenly restless, and says he wants a change. He will be absent two or three weeks—perhaps longer; so you see, dearest, there is not the slightest excuse for remaining away longer; and Doris, poor child, wants you so badly. I spoke to your grandfather just now about it, but he had another twinge of gout, and was a little testy. “She may come home if she likes. I suppose she does not mean to live permanently at St. Jude’s Vicarage!” was all his answer; but I concluded from this that he is quite ready for your return; so if next Monday or Tuesday will suit you——’

‘Monday or Tuesday!’ ejaculated Gerda, when she came to this, ‘and it is Thursday now—only five days! Oh no, I cannot leave Aunt Clare so soon as that. I——’ And then she took up Doris’s note.

It was very brief, and the gist of the whole was that Gerda must come home as soon as possible.

‘I really cannot do without you any longer, darling,’ wrote Doris. ‘I must strike—I must indeed; it is too utterly deadly, as Maud Hatherley used to say. And, then, Gerard is going up to town—that makes everything so much worse. I could bear your absence with tolerable equanimity when I had Gerard to take me for walks and rides. He has been so good—such a dear! but he has not forgotten you. Oh no, indeed; and I am afraid the remembrance of his failure is still bitter to him. But we get on very well together, and one day he told me that he was very fond of me. Wasn’t it kind of him to say that? “You are such a good little soul, Doey,” he said—“such an unselfish, dear child, and,” glancing at me critically—we were riding down Darley Vale—“you look very nice in your habit.” Now, was

that not odd for Gerard to say all that ? Oh, what rubbish I am writing ! but I always do tell you every little thing that pleases me—and I liked Gerard to say that ; but the post is going out, and mother is in a fidget, as usual. So good-bye, my own darling, and come back soon to your disconsolate little sister.'

' Poor dear Doris !' sighed Gerda ; ' how selfish I am becoming !' But all the same, her heart was heavy within her. Had it come to this—that home meant banishment, exile ? Ah, her eyes were open now ! One flash of consciousness—of blinding, intense light—and then a long sobbing breath of uncontrollable emotion, and a resolute turning away from a certain thought. ' It is not my fault. How can I help it ? Is it wrong to love the highest ? He has saved my life. He is a good man. I can trust him wholly. When he is near me, I feel absolutely at rest. I want nothing ; I ask nothing : I am content. Surely there is no wrong in this ?' She paused, as though she had arrived at a solution satisfactory to herself ; but a conscience like Gerda's was not so easily appeased. ' But mother and Doris——' she began again

by-and-by : she had paid her visit to Molly ; had sat by Molly's clean hearth, listening to a long story about poor Joe ; had consoled, cheered, and exhorted to the best of her power.

'My master always said there was a sort of twist about Joe, a kind of warp in his nature,' Molly said, with her apron to her eyes. 'You see, miss, there was that unfortunate fall of mine over neighbour Green's wire-fence, the summer before Joe was born. Perhaps you heard how bad I was. Dr. Brown never thought I could have lived through it. Joe—poor chap!' And here followed one of those minute and realistic descriptions in which women of Molly's class are apt to indulge, and which make the cheeks of youthful district visitors burn hotly. Molly meant no harm, poor soul ! It was a grim reality to her, fighting her way with her babe through the shadows of death.

'I was sore feared that my baby would die,' she finished, 'but it seems I have got my wish for naught. I would sooner have laid Joe in his coffin—ah, that I would !—and my master says the same, than have him shame us like this.'

‘Perhaps Joe has repented, and will do better soon,’ returned Gerda, taking the hard, work-worn hand in hers, and pressing it gently. ‘Now I must go, and I dare not promise to come and see you again, as I am going home soon ;’ and then, as she closed the cottage-door behind her, the uneasy voice within her had made itself heard again.

‘Selfishness must be wrong, and it is selfish not to want to go home to mother and Doris,’ she thought. ‘One ought always to want one’s home people, and yet—and yet——’ Gerda got no farther than this. In spite of conscience, in spite of the promptings of an affectionate nature, the claims of that imperious guest who knocks so loudly, so imperatively, at women’s hearts—ay, and at men’s hearts too, and will not be denied admittance—was clamouring at the girlish citadel which Gerda was so feebly defending.

‘Just a corner, just a seat by your hearth that no one else wants,’ is the deceptive pleading. ‘Call me Friendship—anything you like ; clothe me in any venerable or youthful garb : only let me sit awhile.’ Ah,

well, she had yielded! What was Love, the humble suppliant, doing now? Truly, he had been right busy. Not a corner, but each room—the whole house—was under his sway. The young mistress could no longer shut him out.

Gerda was so absorbed by this self-argument that she was quite unconscious that for the last five minutes footsteps were behind her. Someone, who had watched her leave Milly's cottage, was quietly following her.

'What a fluke!' were Dr. Lyall's words, as he had caught sight of the gray gown. A fluke indeed! one of those curious coincidences which happen at times! Dr. Lyall had no patient in Comberley, but a friend had asked him to call when he had a leisure half-hour. The friend had been engaged—a whole bevy of visitors—and he had taken his leave very quickly. When he saw Gerda, he made up his mind what to do. A walk was just what he wanted. He would send the brougham home; he gave the instructions to his coachman, loitered under pretext of reading a letter until the man was out of sight, and then walked on

swiftly down the long country road until he came up with her.

‘Miss Meredith!’

Ah, she was startled indeed—so startled that the fresh colour that exercise had brought to her cheeks quite faded away.

‘You here?’ she said tremulously; for of all strange things this was the strangest.

He took the matter very coolly; he must have been blind not to see her obvious discomposure at the sight of him. He had taken her too much by surprise, and yet not for worlds would he have missed this.

‘Shall we walk on?’ he continued, as though anxious to give a matter-of-course air to the meeting. ‘I saw you coming out of that low white cottage by the wheelwright’s; and as our roads lay together for awhile, I thought I might be permitted to join you.’

‘I did not know that you had patients at Comberley,’ she said, trying hard to feel at her ease.

‘Neither have I,’ he returned; ‘but some friends of mine—the Fenwicks—live at Mitre Lodge, and I have long owed

them a visit. Need we walk so fast, Miss Meredith? Are you in any hurry?' Then, as she slackened her pace, he observed nonchalantly: 'What a delightful afternoon! There is just a touch of east in the wind, but it is not cold. March is more lamb-like than usual this year.'

'I do love the spring,' observed Gerda.

Now, what was there in such a simple speech to bring about a declaration of love? All girls love spring. There was nothing extraordinary in Gerda's quiet statement; but she glanced at Dr. Lyall as she spoke, and that shy, sweet look drove the doctor's prudence to the winds in a moment. He saw his opportunity, and seized it.

'Yes, I saw you coming out of the cottage,' he resumed boldly, 'and I sent the brougham away, and followed you. One can never get you alone for a moment at the Vicarage, and I wanted to talk to you, and to tell you a little about myself;' and here he paused, perhaps to take breath.

'Yes.'

Gerda could hardly say less. A monosyllabic reply is not the most gracious form of utterance; but speech was difficult to her

that moment. Dr. Lyall's abruptness, the emphasis laid on the last words, 'I wanted to talk to you, and to tell you a little about myself,' made any other answer impossible.

'May I venture to hope that it will interest you?' he continued, with renewed animation. 'I am a poor man, Miss Meredith—comparatively poor, I mean. Circumstances have been somewhat against me, and one must have time to achieve professional success. It will be uphill work with me for some years, and perhaps I may never be a rich man; and yet—and yet—though I know this, I dare to tell you that I love you dearly, and that it is my greatest wish and longing to win your love in return.'

She had known it was coming; the sympathy between them was too perfect for her to mistake his meaning. Of course she had known that he had followed her purposely, when she had walked on faster and he had gently checked her. It was because her instinct told her that the supreme crisis of her life had come. At such moments a woman's happiness is largely tempered by fear. She longed yet dreaded to hear his next words. When they came—a frank,

manly confession—that his heart was hers, her calmness surprised herself.

‘Would it make you happy?’ she returned, in a low voice.

‘It would make me supremely happy, Gerda!’—stopping her impetuously, and taking her hands—‘there is no one near us; we are absolutely alone this moment. Tell me truthfully, could you put up with such a poor plain life for my sake?’

‘For your sake,’ she answered slowly, but her eyes were fixed on the stones at her feet, ‘I would put up with a far poorer life.’

‘Thank you!’ but she missed the flash of joy in his eyes as he dropped her hands, and they walked on again in blissful silence.

They were not absolutely alone now. A cart was slowly climbing up the hill, and some labourers, returning from work, had just come in sight; in a few more minutes they would have reached the cross-roads. He had meant to have turned off there, and left her. His intention had been to strike off in the direction of Hexham Down, and so reach his own home by a circuitous route; he had had no wish to walk with her through

Cromehurst. A few minutes' conversation was all he had expected, but now—now—lifting up his head high with joyful pride, he would go to the very door of the Vicarage with her. Was she not his—his own property? Oh, the simplicity and beauty of this girlish nature! With what grace, with what womanly dignity, she had given herself to him. 'For your sake I would put up with a far poorer life!'—words to be stamped on his memory for ever.

It was a long time before the silence between them was broken. They had passed the labourers, and were now in a more populated part; they were passing the house where Hester's little pupil had lain dying when Dr. Lyall spoke again. There was a new tone in his voice, a quiet air of possession, as he asked her if she were tired.

'Oh no, not at all tired.'

'I must take the blame of your paleness, then. Perhaps I ought not to have spoken so abruptly; but the opportunity was too good, and I could not help myself. Was I wrong, dearest?'—dropping his voice. 'Ought I to have spoken to Sir Godfrey or your mother first? I think I meant to do so.'

I have begun a letter to Sir Godfrey, but I had no courage to finish it. I felt I must find out first what chance there was for me. How could I tell what answer you might have for me ?

‘No, you were not wrong.’

‘I am thankful to hear that, but I am afraid your people will not endorse that opinion. Do you know, I had a desire to make Mrs. Glyn my confidante, but her illness prevented it. Will you help me with your mother ? Of course I will write to Sir Godfrey at once. You would wish me to do that ?’—turning to her quickly.

‘Oh yes,’ she returned, with a sigh. By-and-by, when she had courage for it, she must tell him about Gerard, and about her grandfather’s wishes, but not now—nothing must spoil this first hour. ‘Grand will not be pleased,’ she continued, rather sadly ; ‘he is ambitious, he thinks it wrong to be poor. You know’—stammering slightly—‘that I am poor, too.’

‘I am glad to hear it ;’ and he really meant what he said.

Dr. Lyall was too proud a man to wish to owe anything to the woman he married. He

was quite aware that the sisters were portionless. Mrs. Hake had informed him once quite casually in conversation that both Gerda and Doris were dependent on their grandfather's goodwill. 'Gerard Hamlyn will have most of the money. He is a good fellow, and his great-uncle is devoted to him.'

'I do not think either of us are mercenary,' he went on; 'and yet, for your sake, dear, I trust I shall not always be poor. I shall be covetous of riches now. After all, I have told you nothing about myself, and yet I want you to know everything—it is your right. One thing I must ask you—you would not wish me to do less for Hester?'

'I wish you——Oh, Dr. Lyall!'

Then he shook his head at her with a smile.

'Dr. Lyall will have to be Alick now. Do you like my old-fashioned name, Gerda?'

'Oh, so much!' But she added shyly: 'You will have to wait until I get used to you.'

'Do not keep me too long waiting, then. Do you remember that dinner-party at the Hakes', and our talk about names? How

cold and distant you were at first, and then how sweetly and humbly you made your apology! I believe I fell in love with you then.'

'Did you?'

'Did I! What a curt answer! But you will talk more to me by-and-by. Ah, there is the Vicarage! Are you going to ask me in, or shall I come up of my own accord?'

Then she laughed a little nervously, and ran up the steps, and he followed her closely.

'Is Aunt Clare still in the study?' she asked, as the servant admitted them.

'Yes, miss; and master is there, too. He came in ten minutes ago.'

'Why need we disturb them,' whispered Dr. Lyall as Susan retreated; 'you can go to them presently, but I have not seen you yet. Let me help you off with that warm jacket, and the hat—will you take off that, too?' and as she obeyed him, he put his hands gently on her shoulders. 'Let me look at you in your new character,' he said tenderly, and then he drew her closer and kissed her.

'Aunt Clare will want her tea,' she pleaded, when they had talked a little together. 'Will

you spare me for a moment while I take her a cup ?'

'Do not be long,' he returned pleadingly. 'I shall have to go away soon. Gerda, you will write to your mother to-night, will you not ? Our letters must go by the same post. Then there is Mrs. Glyn. I think she ought to know how things are between us. And Hester—of course I must tell Hester.'

'But not yet—not until we have heard from mother and Grand.' Oh, the sweetness of that 'we' to her lover's ears. 'I think it would be better to wait a little.'

'Hester will find it out for herself. She is very sharp. She will guess something directly she sees me. Must you go ? Is that tea ready ?' and he opened the door so grudgingly that Gerda laughed her old silvery laugh.

'Dr. Lyall is in the drawing-room, Uncle Horace,' she said very demurely, as she set down the little tray by the couch. 'I am going to give him some tea directly. He asked after you, Aunt Clare, but he thinks it will be better to see you to-morrow morning.'

'Dr. Lyall here !' observed Mrs. Glyn in surprise. 'I thought he was not to come to-day. I am sure he said so. If he be here,

perhaps I ought to see him. Horace, will you tell him so? I must really give him a hint that these daily visits are no longer necessary.'

'I should leave that to him, my dear. I shall grudge him nothing, if he only makes a woman of you again. She really looks better, does she not, nurse?' -- a name he often jokingly used. 'But come, we must not keep the doctor waiting.'

'When Dr. Lyall has gone, you may come and tell me about Molly,' observed Mrs. Glyn. 'Your walk has done you good, Gerda; you have quite a fine colour. How very pretty she looks!' was her thought as the girl tripped happily away. 'I have wondered once or twice if Dr. Lyall admires her. But no; he always says he cannot afford to fall in love, and I suppose he knows best.'





CHAPTER XIII.

SIR GODFREY RECEIVES A LETTER.

‘I am not fond of expecting catastrophes, but there are cracks in the world.’—SYDNEY SMITH.

It is impossible to predict what a day may bring forth. The morning postman, whistling cheerily as he trudges down the long roads, may carry about with him in that harmless-looking bag of his materials which may cause moral explosion to an entire household. The blue business envelope lies on the master’s plate; the master himself, fresh from his bath, well groomed, well shaved, enters the breakfast-room with pleasurable anticipations of hot coffee and devilled kidneys. The letter attracts his eyes. He opens it to find himself on the brink of ruin. Some bank has failed; some speculation has miscarried. But Fate’s

messenger is still trudging along the roads and is whistling as cheerily as ever.

‘Willingly give thyself up to Clotho,’ says the old philosopher M. Aurelius Antoninus, ‘allowing her to spin thy thread into whatever things she pleases.’ And again, ‘Be like the promontory against which the waves continually break, but it stands firm and tames the fury of the water around it.’

Mrs. Meredith was not an intellectual woman. She had never even heard of M. Aurelius Antoninus, and though she was dimly conscious that Clotho was one of the Fates, no philosophical axiom would have soothed her perturbed mind when she became acquainted with the contents of her daughter’s letter. She had entered the dining-room that March morning with the placid cheerfulness that was habitual to her.

‘There is a letter from Gerda, mother,’ observed Doris eagerly; ‘do open it quickly, please—it is to tell us which day we may expect her.’

‘I am afraid it must wait until after prayers,’ returned her mother, with a longing look at the envelope. ‘I hear your grandfather’s step outside the door, and he never

likes to find us reading our letters'—for Sir Godfrey was as full of whims as a woman, and loved to enforce trifling regulations on his obedient household.

Sir Godfrey was not growing younger ; his twinges of gout had become more frequent of late, and his evening naps more prolonged, but he was always at his best in the early morning. He would come down from his valet's hands clean-shaved, and looking a thorough impersonation of an aristocratic old gentleman. The morning duties suited him perfectly ; he liked to see the decorous servants file into the room ; he loved to read prayers in that sonorous voice of his, and to extend a patriarchal benediction on his servants. Family worship always soothed him, and, unless his letters contained unsatisfactory news, or Mrs. Meredith's bills were excessive, he would take his breakfast with much enjoyment, discussing general news between whiles about the garden, the farm, or village affairs, or listening to his grand-daughter's blithe chatter.

'What have we here?' he began, lifting the cover while Mrs. Meredith, still restraining her longings, poured out the coffee. 'Fish-

cakes and kidneys—humph!—ah, yes. Which will you take, Honoria—and you, Doris?—Put on the cover again, Stephens. I will wait a little.—There is cold game on the sideboard—ah, to be sure! Perhaps a little of that pheasant, but there is no hurry. A business letter!—fixing his eyeglasses more carefully—‘do I know that handwriting? Dear me! the post-mark is Cromehurst. Cromehurst—I have no correspondent at Cromehurst. I am not aware’—opening the envelope rather slowly—‘that my son-in-law has ever honoured me with a letter——’

‘Oh dear, oh dear!’ murmured Mrs. Meredith, who had not heard one word of this. The family seldom listened to Sir Godfrey’s rambling remarks; his talk generally meandered like a trickling rivulet. Sir Godfrey loved to descant, expatiate, enlarge, on every passing topic, to carry on a running commentary that needed no answer. ‘Oh dear!’ sighed the poor woman helplessly. Gerda had certainly not beaten about the bush; her first sentence conveyed all that there was to tell, and as Mrs. Meredith read it, she felt as though some earthquake had brought the roof about her ears.

‘Did you speak, my dear?—eh! what—what—what is this—what is he talking about? Alexander Lyall! Why, that is the name of the fellow—doctor, isn’t he?—who pulled Gerda out of the lake! Upon my honour, you are coming it very strong, Dr. Lyall! Wants to enter our family, eh!—wants to marry my grand-daughter. There, there!’—flinging it across the table with a gesture of disgust—‘you are the girl’s mother! Just look at that. Did you ever hear such impudence? Thinks himself equal to the Hamlyns, does he? But I will soon prove his mistake to him.’ And Sir Godfrey, fuming and fretting, sat glaring at his unhappy daughter.

‘I have a letter from Gerda, too,’ she began tremulously, but Sir Godfrey only shouted to her to read the letter. His breakfast was spoilt; an unpleasant sensation warned him that he must be careful not to excite himself.

‘Read it,’ he went on, and Mrs. Meredith was obliged to take up the letter.

Poor Dr. Lyall! That hapless epistle had cost him much labour. He had written more than one copy, and at last, in despair,

had sent off a final attempt, which he thought miserably inadequate.

‘MY DEAR SIR GODFREY’ (he wrote),

‘Our acquaintance is a very limited one, and I fear the contents of this note will surprise you, for I am going to ask of you the greatest favour that any man can ask of another man, and I have no excuse to offer for my boldness. I have succeeded in winning the affections of your eldest granddaughter. I have seen a great deal of Miss Meredith since her arrival at St. Jude’s Vicarage, and a mutual sympathy has grown up between us. May I hope that you will not think me presumptuous?’—and thereupon followed a brief but explicit statement of his affairs, present and prospective. ‘I fear, indeed,’ he went on, ‘that you would prefer a richer man for your grand-daughter, but I hope that in a year or two I may be able to give her the comforts she requires. If you will grant me my request, it shall be the object of my life to make her happy and shield her in every possible way. My dear sir, we love each other. Need I say more? May I entreat you to look favourably on my petition?’

‘If you desire a personal interview, I will gladly come to Chesterton, and will do anything in my power to meet and carry out your wishes. Miss Meredith is writing to her mother by this post.

‘Yours very truly,

‘ALEXANDER LYALL.’

‘It is a very gentlemanly letter,’ faltered Mrs. Meredith, ‘and he seems thoroughly in earnest; and Gerda says—oh, dear! I am afraid she wishes to marry him—she says they are engaged, and that she is so happy! Let me have the letter, Doris.’

For Doris was shedding tears over it—tears of mingled pity and amazement, that this doctor, with his rough brown moustache and quizzical voice, should be preferred to Gerard—to Gerard! Oh, what would Gerard say?—and so on, in a whirl of futile sympathy and sorrow.

There was certainly no mistake about Gerda’s feelings :

‘MOTHER DEAR,

‘What will you and Doris say,’ she began, ‘when I tell you that Dr. Lyall has

asked me to marry him, and that I have promised to do so? Yes, we are actually engaged; we were engaged three hours ago. I feel as though I were in a dream! I am so happy that I want to sit down and think over the wonderful thing that has happened to me, but he has begged me to write to you instead. He wants my letter to go with his to Grand, but I have just remembered that you will not receive it until Wednesday morning.

‘ Dear mother—and you too, Doris—I do want you to be pleased about this. Do try, for my sake; for, indeed, I am so very happy. He is such a good man; I think I know more about his goodness every day; and then he is so clever! Is it not wonderful that he loves me? To me it is the greatest wonder in the world! You must not mind my saying all this; I think I am a little bit dazed this evening. After all, it has come so suddenly, and of course I long to talk to you both.

‘ Dear mother, please take my part and his, if Grand be very angry. He will be vexed that Dr. Lyall is not a rich man. Grand thinks so much about money and worldly things, but to me this is nothing.

Shall I tell you what he said—his very words? I think I remember them exactly: “Can you put up with a poor, plain life for my sake?” And what do you think I answered him? I felt he must have the truth—the real, unvarnished truth—from my lips: “For your sake”—yes, I actually said that!—“I would put up with a far poorer life.” Was it bold of me to say that? I do not think so. I felt I owed it to him.

‘Now, darling mother, do your best for me. Let Grand know that I have given Dr. Lyall my word, and that nothing on earth will induce me to take it back—that I belong to him now. I am not in the least afraid that you will withhold your consent. I know you care only to see your children happy. When you know Dr. Lyall better, you will care for him too, and you will forget any other wishes that you may have formed. Poor dear Gerard! But I was right to refuse him—I am quite sure of that now. Ask Doris to write to me.

‘Your loving daughter,

‘GERDA.’

‘Will you put down that letter and attend

to me, Honoria?' demanded Sir Godfrey angrily. 'What have you got to say about the fellow's insolence? Gerda says—pooh! who cares what the child says?—a heartless little minx who has thrown over the finest young fellow in the world.'

'Father,' remonstrated Mrs. Meredith feebly, 'I think if we waited a little it would be better,' looking apprehensively at Doris, who was making a vain attempt to drink her coffee with the tears running into the cup.

Poor, soft-hearted Doris! torn to pieces with disappointment and dismay for Gerard, and yet secretly exultant at Gerda's happiness.

'How can she—how can she prefer him to Gerard?' she thought, with a sudden pang at the idea of Gerard's perfections.

'Doris,' snapped Sir Godfrey, 'if you are only playing with your breakfast, perhaps you will be kind enough to leave me with your mother;' and Doris was thankful to obey him, but she managed to whisper in her mother's ear as she passed:

'Grand must not separate them. Do all you can for poor Gerda.'

'I do not think you ought to be angry

with Dr. Lyall, father,' observed his daughter timidly, as her supporter withdrew. 'He may not be rich, but he is a gentleman.'

But this mild remark brought down a torrent of wrath on her devoted head.

'Are you such a fool, Honoria, as to think a beggarly apothecary a desirable son-in-law? Have you no more pride than that? Are you aware that Dr. Lyall's sister—yes, actually his sister—keeps a little day-school? Why, Hake told me that himself, and the fellow pays for her brats' schooling.' Sir Godfrey seldom measured his words when he was in a rage, and then he settled down at a white heat. 'Look here! I am just going to write to Dr. Lyall and civilly decline the honour he proposes to do us. Oh, I will be civil. I have other views—we have other views—for my grand-daughter. I will tell him that it is not in my power to grant him this favour, and so on, and then you can write to the girl.'

'And what am I to tell her?'

'Tell her! Do you want me to dictate the very words, and you her mother! For shame, Honoria! You are no better than a child yourself. Tell her to forget all this

rubbish, and to come home at once. Make her understand'—with a certain threatening intonation in his voice—'that she must at once cancel this precious engagement of hers—that she must give up the fellow, or——'

'Or?' queried Mrs. Meredith, cowed for the moment by the anger in the old man's eyes. 'Surely you do not wish me to say any more than that?'

But this faint opposition only fanned the smouldering embers of his wrath afresh.

'But I do!' he retorted fiercely. 'Tell her from me—from me, who have fed and clothed her all her life, and whose benefits she has repaid with such base ingratitude—tell her that until she has repented of her folly, and has promised to think no more of the man, the Hall shall no longer be her home—she may stop with Clare. There, you may tell her that!'

'I will do nothing of the kind,' returned Mrs. Meredith, roused to real opposition by this. Even a worm will turn, and the weakest woman will simulate courage for the sake of her children. 'Father, you have no right to be so hard and tyrannical. Dr. Lyall may not be a good match—I would myself have

preferred Gerard a hundred times—but there is no need to treat him with contempt. If he has fallen in love with her, it is surely no crime that he should wish to marry her.’

‘Why did he not come and ask my consent first?’ retorted Sir Godfrey. ‘In our class we do not approve of clandestine love-making. The girl must have encouraged him, and, no doubt, Clare and that precious husband of hers are at the bottom of the mischief. It is a conspiracy to thwart and vex me. No, madam!’—lashing himself up to fresh fury—‘if you cannot keep your children in better order, you must suffer for it as well as they. Until the girl promises to give the doctor fellow up, she shall not come here.’

‘Then I will go to her,’ and Mrs. Meredith faced round upon the old man with a resolution and dignity that took him by surprise. Once before had she held her own with him—once before she had thrown off the yoke of his tyranny, when he had insulted her widowhood; and now she had taken up arms in defence of her child.

‘If you banish Gerda you banish me,’ she said, and there was no faltering in her voice. ‘Father, you demand too much; flesh and

blood cannot bear it. No mother would consent to be parted from her child for such a cause. I have only two—they are dear good children! They are my Algy's children;' and then her brief wrath evaporated, and she rocked herself gently to and fro and wept.

'Pooh! stuff and nonsense! Who is talking of Algy?' returned Sir Godfrey impatiently. But he spoke with less assurance. He had not expected her to turn upon him like this. Honoria was such a poor thing, such a mild, submissive slave to his whims, that he had never doubted that his word would be law to her, and her assumption of maternal rights had rather astonished him. 'What has Algy got to do with it? Do you mean to tell me that, after a lifetime spent under my roof, you—you will thwart me too?'

The angry sorrow in Sir Godfrey's voice went to his daughter's heart. After all, he had shielded her forlorn widowhood, and in his own way he had been a father to her girls.

'No,' she returned gently, 'I have no wish to thwart you. But I cannot consent to treat Gerda unkindly. If you will not have her

here I will go to Cromehurst. Clare will take me in, and you will not miss me for a week or two. I must talk to Gerda; I must see for myself how far her happiness depends on this marriage. Gerda is one-and-twenty. She is old enough to judge for herself. Neither you nor I have a right to forbid this marriage.'

'There I differ from you,' he replied wrathfully, 'and I can and will forbid it. Is not one *mésalliance* in our family enough? I shall write my letter at once to Dr. Lyall, and I shall tell him that I must refuse his flattering proposal. If he marries Gerda he will marry a beggar, and I will never see either of them again.' And Sir Godfrey straightened his old back, and held his head high, and marched out of the room, leaving his weeping daughter with the relics of a doubtful victory round her. Doris soon crept in to console her mother.

'Don't fret, mammie dear,' she said, winding her arms round the widow's neck. 'Grand is in an awful rage, but he will soon get over it; and, after all, Gerda is your child, not his.'

'I will never be separated from my children,' sobbed the poor woman hysterically. 'All

these years I have tried to do my duty to your grandfather ; but there are limits even to duty. When it comes to choosing between my father and my children, do you think I should hesitate ?

‘ No, mammie dear, of course not. And now do please dry your poor eyes, and let us talk comfortably. You must go to Crome-hurst and talk to Gerda, and then you must write and tell me everything she says. Oh, if I could only come too !’

‘ My dear, it would be impossible. Gerard is away, and if your grandfather should have one of his attacks of gout——’

And then Doris sorrowfully agreed with her mother.

‘ And you will be good to her,’ she continued when they had talked a little more. ‘ At first I was so sorry for Gerard that I could not think about anything else. But, mother dear, if Gerda really loves Dr. Lyall, you will try to like him too ?’

‘ I shall be sure to do that, Doris. As far as I remember, I thought him very pleasing. And, then, he saved Gerda’s life ; after that, how can I be hard to him ?’

‘ But all the same, I did not want him for

my brother-in-law, and I am not sure that I want him now. I think'—reflectively—'that I am a little afraid of him. He says clever, sarcastic things in a quiet way; and then, if Gerda marries him, she will be so dreadfully poor. How will she manage, mother? She knows nothing about housekeeping, and bills, and money;' and Doris's round face looked puckered and miserable. But her mother had no comfort to suggest.

When Doris had been called away, Mrs. Meredith went up to her own room and wrote a letter to her child—a motherly, tender, helpless sort of letter, that made Gerda sigh.

'Oh, my dear,' she wrote, after a few sentences expressing her own and Doris's astonishment at the news, 'your poor grandfather is in a terrible state of anger. He will have it that Dr. Lyall has behaved badly in not speaking to us first; and, indeed, it would have been far wiser if he had done so. Young people are so different nowadays; they are so much more independent and outspoken than when Clare and I were young. To be sure, Clare had her own way, but Horace spoke to your grandfather first. My darling, are you sure that you have been

prudent? If you had only waited a little before you gave Dr. Lyall an answer! Marriage is such an awful responsibility. When a woman marries, she is taking a yoke for her whole life. Do you not remember, dearest, that I blamed you for overhaste in refusing poor Gerard? And now you have already promised yourself to another man. This is what has angered your grandfather. He declares, until you give up this folly, that he will not have you at the Hall; and, indeed, I do not see how we could eat our bread together in any comfort. But, darling, if your grandfather forsakes you, you have still your mother. No lover shall be a barrier between me and my girls. I am coming up to Cromehurst, and then we can talk about this. For the last year I have longed to see your aunt Clare, and this is my opportunity. Your grandfather is writing to Dr. Lyall at this moment. I greatly fear the letter will be a hard one; perhaps, under the circumstances, I will send him no message. Let him know that I bear him no ill-will; but, all the same, if it had only been Gerard!—Gerard is like my own son, and I love him

dearly. Dr. Lyall is a stranger to me, and yet you tell me that you are engaged to him.'

'May I see that letter?' asked Dr. Lyall, as he came in that morning. He found his sweetheart sitting disconsolate by the fire. They had been engaged three days now, and Gerda had become accustomed already to his quiet greeting. As he looked in her face a moment, the shadow in her eyes was distinctly visible to him. 'Shall we exchange letters?' he asked with a smile. And Gerda, with some reluctance, put her mother's letter into his hand.

'You do not want me to read this,' he observed, as he detained her hand, for he understood her perfectly.

'I am so afraid it may hurt you,' she returned apologetically. 'Mother does not mean to be unkind—she is never unkind—but she is so upset about all this, and Grand has been worrying her. She thinks I have been in too great a hurry—that I should have waited a little. Mother is a little vague, and—and——' And here Gerda faltered and grew embarrassed; for, after all, her real reluctance was not so much for

this part of the letter. If only her mother had not mentioned Gerard !

‘If you do not wish me to read it, I will give it back to you unread,’ he said, a little gravely ; ‘but I hoped that you would have allowed me to share your trouble. Of course, I see that you are worried. I can read your thoughts quite easily.’

Then, blushing hotly, she put the letter back into his hand.

‘Ah!’ with a slight change of tone, as he reached a certain paragraph. ‘So Mr. Hamlyn is the favoured suitor?’ and then he gently turned her face round, and made her look at him, though it was difficult for Gerda to meet that quietly amused glance. ‘Am I to ask the meaning of all this, Gerda, or am I to understand without any telling?’

‘I always meant to tell you,’ she returned in a low voice ; ‘but it was so difficult to begin the subject. I was so dreadfully unhappy about it ; and even now I cannot bear to think of it.’ Then he pressed her hand.

‘You need not trouble to tell me. I was only teasing you, because you looked so shy.

I know all about it, darling—you refused him the night of the dance. Do you remember my finding you in the morning-room? I understood all about it then.'

'Did you?' in a whisper, 'Poor Gerard!'

'Poor Gerard indeed! How could you have the heart to say "No" to him? When I think of the contrast between us, and between his circumstances and mine, I do not wonder at your mother's preference.' And then he finished the letter.





CHAPTER XIV.

‘DO YOU CALL HIM ALICK?’

‘I love her with a love as still
As a broad river’s peaceful might,
Which, by high tower and lonely mill,
Goes wandering at its own will,
And yet doth ever flow aright.
And on its full, deep breast serene,
Like quiet isles, my duties lie ;
It flows around them and between,
And makes them fresh and fair and green,
Sweet homes in which to live and die.’

LOWELL.

AFTER this, Sir Godfrey’s letter was read.

Probably that outpouring of wrath to his daughter had acted as a safety-valve, for when Sir Godfrey had seated himself at his writing-table, and had drawn his blotting-pad towards him, the fierceness of his anger had somewhat evaporated.

Certainly, there was no fault to find with

the letter. It was perfectly courteous, and, in spite of the formality of the sentences, it was by no means ungracious. The refusal to entertain the idea of Dr. Lyall as a suitor for his grand-daughter was given very civilly.

Sir Godfrey regretted—very much regretted—that he was unable to meet Dr. Lyall's views, and that his very flattering offer must be declined. He begged to thank him extremely for the honour he had done them, but he had other intentions regarding his grand-daughter; and he must add that his daughter, Mrs. Meredith, was of the same mind with himself. A family alliance had already been projected, but it was hardly necessary to mention that at present: under any circumstances—‘any circumstances’ fiercely underlined—Dr. Lyall's proposal could not be entertained for a moment. He was sorry to speak so decidedly, but truth was best, and prevented mistakes in future. He had no wish to hurt his feelings, but he must point out very distinctly that, in his opinion, Dr. Lyall's pecuniary resources hardly warranted his aspiring to his grand-daughter. His grand-daughters had been his dearest care. They had been brought up under his own

eye, and were too delicately nurtured to be fit for such a position. A medical man just beginning practice could certainly not provide luxuries for his wife, and so on, in Sir Godfrey's verbose style.

'Well, dearest,' as Gerda laid down the letter, 'you see that Sir Godfrey refuses his consent?'

'Yes; and I am not surprised. Grand is very worldly. He has told us over and over again that we must marry rich men. All my life I have been taught that.'

'But all the same, you do not seem to have learnt your lesson. Gerda, what are we to do? I am afraid that Sir Godfrey is right, and I cannot give my wife luxuries. Can she do without them?'—looking at her wistfully.

'I thought that I answered that question once before,' was her reproachful answer.

'Yes, darling; but if I crave for some further assurance?'

Then she looked at him in her quiet, serious way.

'Grand has been very good to us,' she said simply, 'and Doris and I have had all we wanted. But it will not trouble me to go

without things. My one fear—may I tell you what I fear?’ And as he smiled and waited, she went on. ‘I have never managed things or kept house, and I am afraid I hardly know the value of money. If I were to be a hindrance and not a help——’ very anxiously, but he only smiled again.

‘I think you will make a better house-keeper than Pamela; and you can learn—Mrs. Glyn would teach you. I do not think I am at all afraid. But, Gerda, about this letter? What are we to do, if your grandfather will not listen to reason? Shall I go down to Chesterton, and insist on having an interview? or shall we wait until your mother comes?’

‘I think it will be best to wait for mother,’ she returned. ‘Grand must have time to get used to the idea; and after all,’ drawing herself up with dignity, ‘I am of age.’

‘Does that mean that you will not give me up?’

‘Most certainly it does! Why should I give you up?’

‘Ah! why, indeed? But I could not let you go,’ looking at her with proud tender-

ness. 'I must keep you, in spite of all the Sir Godfreys in the world. Gerda, I believe I am bewitched. Where you are concerned, I am unreasonable. Now I must go, for my patients are waiting. Do you think Mrs. Glyn will let me come in this evening?' And, as Gerda was quite sure of this, he took his leave.

'As though anyone—anyone could make me give him up!' thought Gerda, as she sat down to her embroidery. And there was a brightness in her eyes, and a soft colour in her face, as she remembered certain words he had spoken. Had she bewitched him? Had he not rather bewitched her? for in her heart she knew how gladly she would leave her beautiful home for any home of his, however humble it might be. What was Chesterton Hall, and the traditions of the Hamlyns, and a doating, irascible grandfather, compared with this man's love?

Dr. Lyall's mind was a little disturbed as he got into his brougham. After all, Sir Godfrey's letter was a bitter pill for a proud man to swallow, and in spite of his philosophy he felt himself somewhat hurt.

'There was no need for such a positive

refusal,' he thought. 'Gerda is no heiress—as far as I know, she has not a penny; and of course my practice will increase, if I only keep my health.' And then he looked a little grave. 'I can certainly make no settlement on my wife. My insurance policy is all that I can offer, but most men take this risk. As for equality, my family is as old as his, though we have no titles or land; but the Lyalls come of a good old stock—I mean, in Sir Godfrey's opinion. On my mother's side we had a wild Borderer or two, who killed his enemy's cattle. Why, I could prove to him that an ancestor of mine fell on Flodden Field. I wonder what the old man would say to that! We are no counter-jumpers; not a Lyall that I remember has ever been in trade. But he is such an obstinate old buffer, that I am afraid this will make no difference.

'If I were only sure that I have not been guilty of rank selfishness in winning my darling's affections; and yet—no, I will not believe that: she was not happy, not quite happy. Somehow her environment hardly satisfied her. She wanted more, she wanted what only I could give her. From the first

she appealed to me, she sought my advice. I have thought it out very carefully. She will be happy with me, however little I can give her—happier than if I let her go. And as for me'—here Dr. Lyall's eyes softened—'it is rest only to be near her. She is so different from other girls of her age ; there is such repose and gentleness about her. I have heard her spoken of as dreamy and absent—Mrs. Hake said that Doris was her favourite—though she is never absent with me. She does not always talk much, because she is still a little shy with me ; but no one can talk better when she is in the mood.' And then, as the brougham stopped, he broke off his lover-like reflections.

'Has your friend gone?' asked Mrs. Glyn, entering the room cautiously. 'Jane told me he was here.'

'Yes ; he did not stay long, but he is coming again this evening. I told him that I was sure you would not mind.'

'On the contrary, I shall be delighted, and so will your uncle Horace. He declared to me this morning that this engagement has done me a world of good. What do you

think of that?'—settling herself comfortably on the couch.

'I am glad to hear it,' was Gerda's decisive answer, and it was true Mrs. Glyn looked certainly better. She had been intensely surprised at the news of her niece's engagement to Dr. Lyall; indeed, for the first moment the intelligence had almost taken her breath away, but, all the same, she had been immensely charmed. Mr. Glyn had joined them at that moment, and though the conversation had abruptly ceased on his entrance, he saw at once, by the excited look on his wife's face, that something had happened.

'What is it, Clare?' he asked, a little suspiciously, for he observed every change of expression now; indeed, his lynx-like vigilance and peremptory guardianship over the invalid were at times almost trying. 'You are looking feverish, my dear.'

'May I tell him, Gerda? Oh, please let me tell him.'

But, after all, she did not wait for permission, and Mr. Glyn was immensely surprised and pleased too. If his congratulations

were rather solemn, they were at least sincere.

'You are very fortunate,' he said. 'I think highly of Lyall. He is an excellent fellow.'

'I am so glad you like him, Uncle Horace.'

'Who could help liking him? Your aunt is devoted to him. He is thoroughly true. One cannot say that of every man.'

'Yes, and think, Horace, what it will be to me to have Gerda near me! Of course, my father and Honoria will not be pleased. They had other plans—eh, Gerda?'

And then Mr. Glyn had delivered a little homily. He rejoiced, so he began, to find there was one girl in the world who could be true to herself, who had sufficient greatness of mind to despise the advantages of wealth and station, who could value a man for himself, and not for his environment. 'Your aunt has set you the example, my dear,' he said, with a benignant look. 'She gave up even more for my sake than you will have to give up for Lyall. Lyall is not such a poor man, though his people hamper him; and in respect of family the Lyalls are unquestionably

respectable. They have good Scotch blood in their veins.'

At the word 'family,' Clare had slightly winced. At such moments Sam Harding and the place in Fleet Street always came into her mind.

Gerda settled her aunt comfortably for the morning, and then she took up her embroidery again. Clare looked at her with amused eyes.

'Do you call him Alick yet?'

'Certainly not,' returned Gerda, with a furious blush. 'He will not expect it.'

'Ah, well, it will come naturally some day. I remember Horace made me begin at once; he was an autocrat even then. I had a little talk with your friend last night when you went out of the room to speak to Mrs. Gardiner. He was rather confidential, and told me that he did not approve of a long engagement for a doctor.'

'Why not, Aunt Clare? A doctor is not different from other men.'

'Oh yes, he is. You will find that out for yourself some day. Other men are not so much at the beck and call of their fellow-creatures. A doctor's domestic life is more

hampered, and, as a rule, he is hardly ever at leisure.'

'Of course I shall expect him to be busy.'

'He will keep you busy too; but I am not speaking of married life: you will have to discover all that for yourself. When Dr. Lyall—shall I have to call him Alick, too, when he is my nephew?—but we will leave that an open question—when he spoke of his dislike to long engagements, he explained that he was only thinking of doctors. "It does not do for a doctor to be too much engrossed with his own affairs, or his patients will find it out"—those were his very words; and then he told me that he should wish to be married as soon as possible.'

'He has told me nothing of the kind'—in a distressed voice.

'No; he was afraid to scare you too soon; besides, I told him you had a passion for long engagements, and that Jacob and Rachel were your ideal lovers. You should have seen his face when I said that! He fairly squirmed, as the Yankees say. "I am afraid I do not agree on that point," he remarked gravely. "I must have a talk to her." So now I warn you. Is that letter from

your mother?'—with a sudden change of voice.

'Yes, we have both had letters. Grand will not hear of our engagement. His letter to Dr. Lyall was very polite, but it was very decided. But should you like to see what mother says?' and then she laid the envelope in Mrs. Glyn's lap.

'Poor dear Honoria! What a life he leads her!' she observed as she folded the letter. 'After all, Gerda, I am not sure that I shall go to Chesterton.'

'Not go to Chesterton?'—in an alarmed tone.

'My dear, just consider what sort of reception I am likely to get, and remember my nerves are not very strong just now. If my father be in this mood he will probably lay all the mischief at my door'—which was just what Sir Godfrey had done. 'He will pretend, until he believes it himself, that Horace and I have brought about this match to spite him. After all, Gerda, I think it will be safer to go to Brighton with Emma.'

'But Mrs. Harding is such an uncongenial companion.'

'Yes, she is uncongenial; I will not deny

that; but in her way she is kind-hearted; she will take every possible care of me, for Horace's sake. I shall have the best of everything, and plenty of it. If I prefer champagne to sauterne, Sam will order it at once, and so it will be with everything.'

'And yet, in spite of the champagne, you will be miserable?'

'No, not miserable. I shall not allow myself to be miserable; but it will certainly not be happiness. One is never happy when one is rubbed up the wrong way all day long.'

'Does Mrs. Harding do that?'

'Yes; but she means it for my good. She will admonish and advise me from morning to night, and her manner will be such an absurd caricature of Horace's that I shall long to throw things at her from pure irritability. Emma always says I have such an ill-regulated mind; and then there will be Sam!'

'Certainly Mr. Harding is not prepossessing.'

'Not in our eyes; but in Emma's he is altogether lovely. I do believe she has invested that shabby little man with every imaginable virtue. I do hate to see them

together. Emma is rather a good-looking woman, and then, with all her faults, she is Horace's sister ; but Sam is odious. The very way he rubs his hands together angers me. Don't you dislike the friction of hands that are rough or chapped ? Sam's hands are always chapped—as a boy he suffered from chilblains ; and then there is his laugh—such a silly, heckling sort of laugh !

‘ Aunt Clare, you shall certainly not go to Brighton.’

‘ Indeed, I am not sure where I shall go. Suppose we wait until your mother comes ? But there is one point on which I am certain, that even Sam's heckling laugh will be easier to bear than my father's black looks ;’ and then she sighed and changed the subject.

Gerda had a visitor that afternoon.

It had become Mrs. Glyn's habit since her illness to retire after luncheon to her husband's study. She was not strong enough for the fatigue of entertaining callers, and this duty devolved on Gerda. Bessie had her French and drawing classes, and the supervision of her little sisters.

It was towards dusk when the door-bell rang, and the next moment Pamela entered.

She had opened and closed the door so quietly, her movements were so unlike Pamela's comet-like flashes, that Gerda looked at her in surprise. Her dress was more sombre than usual, and there were no touches of red about her, none of those startling colour effects in which Pamela delighted.

'Well?' she observed abruptly, as she stood within two paces of Gerda; but she offered no other greeting.

'My dear Pamela, is there anything the matter?'

'That is what I have come to ask you.'

'To ask me! How dreadfully solemn you look! You quite frighten me. Do sit down, please. It is so uncomfortable, staring at each other in this way.'

'I feel solemn,' returned Pamela aggressively. 'It is a very solemn occasion.' Then she sat down and wrinkled her brows, and the corners of her mouth went down in a lachrymose fashion. 'So you and Alick have settled things?'

Gerda started.

'Do you mean that your brother has told you?' she said, rather bewildered by this.

'He promised me that he would not tell anyone just yet.'

'So it is true?' returned Pamela, with just a gleam of mischief in her eyes, though her voice was still lugubrious. 'I was quite sure of it myself, only one likes to be positive about things. No, you need not look so astonished. Alick has told me nothing. I am not in his confidence.'

'Then how did you know?'

But this very natural question seemed to exasperate Pamela. Certainly, her temper was in fault this afternoon.

'How do I know?' disdainfully. 'Am I blind, or deaf, or stupid? Have I no eyes, no perception? Do you think I could sit opposite to Alick for three days, and look at his absurdly happy face, and not guess what had happened? I was "cocksure" of it, as Walter says.'

'Ah, I see!'

'Anyone could see who was not a baby or an idiot. There he sat, smiling at nothing, or making little jokes that fell quite flat because I refused to laugh at them. Then he was so affectionate. It was, "Pam dear, do this for me," until I was so aggravated

that I could hardly sit still. I suppose,' jerking out the words defiantly, 'that Hester has already paid you a visit of congratulation ?'

'My dear Pamela, Hester knows nothing about it. I begged Dr.—I mean your brother—to keep our engagement a secret from everyone until we had heard from my mother and Grand.'

Then a wonderful transformation passed over Pamela ; a cloud seemed to roll off her, and her mouth ceased to droop at the corners.

'Do you mean that he has not told Hester ?'

'Certainly I mean it. Do you think he would tell one sister and not both ? Oh, Pamela, how naughty you are !' for Pamela's eyes were suddenly full of tears. 'Is this why you are so cross with me ? I was afraid—I really was afraid that our engagement vexed you. Are you not pleased,' she continued coaxingly, 'that one day we shall be sisters ?'

'I am not sure that I want a sister,' returned Pamela obstinately. 'If I must have one, I would rather have you, of course.'

Just fancy if Alick had fallen in love with Jessie Brown! I was once terribly afraid of that.'

'I think you had no cause for fear,' replied Gerda, in rather a dignified voice; for naturally this speech did not please her.

Then Pamela gave her a sharp glance.

'Of course I had no cause. Alick has never looked at a girl twice, till you and he broke the ice together. Do you remember Captain Hake's joke? Well, now, you need not be touchy; I meant no unkindness. But the fact is, I am not quite sure that I want Alick to get married. I meant to be married myself first.'

'It will make no difference to you, dear,' returned Gerda gently, for she was beginning to understand.

It was no use expecting Pamela to behave in the usual conventional manner; she was too contradictory, too bristling with sensitive prejudices. She would condole with a person when looked to for hearty congratulations, and she had been known to find occasion for felicitation when paying a visit of condolence to a bereaved family. She had been sternly rebuked for heartlessness by Hester, who

had accompanied her, but no impression had been made.

'What is the use of saying you are sorry?' had been her answer. 'Of course, I was sorry enough; but there is always comfort if you dig deep enough, and I was only helping the poor things to dig.'

When Gerda made this soothing little speech, Pamela looked at her rather oddly.

'I do not think that you know what you are talking about,' she said shortly. 'When Alick marries I shall have to find another home, and—and Derrick will not have me.'

'Really, Pamela, this is too absurd!' and Gerda looked quite hurt. 'I should have thought you had more sense than to think such a thing! Do you suppose for one moment that we should let you go? Please—please do not think either of us so unkind!'

'But Alick will not want me. Even Derrick says two is company and three none. Indeed, I have heard him say more than once that nothing would induce him to have one of his sisters to live with him when he was married. To be sure, they are two tire-

some old maids, and he knows I should not tolerate them.'

'The cases are not in the least similar,' returned Gerda; 'you are much younger than your brother. You poor child! do put this idea out of your head. I have enough to trouble me without this. If I ever—if I ever marry your brother,' blushing beautifully as she spoke, 'I shall try to do all I can for your happiness as well as his. We shall be real sisters, shall we not?' holding out her hand.

And Pamela was vanquished.

'I did not mean to be unkind,' she said, when they had gone through a little scene of reconciliation. 'I have always liked you from the first, and I do want Alick to be happy. You just suit him; he likes quiet, nicely-behaved people; and then he is head-over-ears in love with you. Well, now we have made it up, and I am going to be sweet as honey. You say you have enough to trouble you. Are the home-folk bothering you about Alick?'

'Grand is not at all pleased; he has refused his consent.'

'Grand? Is that the old gentleman with the high nose, who looks as though he were cut out of ivory?'

Then Gerda laughed.

'Sir Godfrey? Oh, I remember! I thought him an old dear. He is such a nice straight-backed old gentleman, and he is always so beautifully groomed, and his hands are lovely; they are like old ivory, too. I do not think I ever saw such nails; they are real filbert nails. What is the matter with the girl? Surely I may praise Sir Godfrey if I like?'

'Yes, of course; but you are so funny, Pamela! I have never noticed Grand's nails. Gerard has a nice hand, too—all the Hamlyns have.'

Then she sighed and looked grave as she mentioned Gerard's name.

'Gerard is the handsome cousin they all wanted you to marry. I have found that out, too'—with a knowing look—'I always find out everything. Derrick says I should make a splendid detective. Now, my dear, I must really go, for I have to dine at The Boltons to-night. Alick says he has an engagement.'

Oh, I thought so!' as Gerda half smiled. 'He is very fully engaged, I see. Good-bye, dear. Never mind the old gentleman ; just stick to Alick, and he will make you as happy as a queen.' And before Gerda could answer her, she was gone.





CHAPTER XV.

‘HAS ANYTHING HAPPENED?’

‘Comparisons spoil impressions, as resemblances spoil faces.’—CARMEN SYLVA.

‘The miseries of man’s life are all beaten out on his own anvil.’—DEAN SWIFT.

MRS. GLYN still kept her invalid’s prerogative of retiring to bed early, and it was Bessie’s privilege to wait on her.

Once, indeed, with her customary unselfishness, she had suggested to her husband that it was time for her to exert herself.

‘I am getting dreadfully spoilt with all this indulgence!’ she observed half playfully and half seriously. I shall soon think it a necessity to have a fire in my room and Bessie to brush my hair.’

But Mr. Glyn turned a deaf ear to this.

‘I will tell you when I see any danger of

self-indulgence,' he returned quietly. 'At present you have only to obey your doctor's orders, and to get strong.' And Clare retired, much comforted. When his wife had left the drawing-room, Mr. Glyn also withdrew to his study, and Gerda and Dr. Lyall were enabled to resume their morning talk; but an interruption soon occurred.

The door-bell rang, and the next minute a tall figure, in a long gray cloak, entered unannounced.

'Hester!' exclaimed her brother, in great surprise.

'You here, Alick?' returned Mrs. Vincent, in much dismay. 'And I am actually intruding on a *tête-à-tête*! But Pamela has just told me, and I felt I could not sleep until I had seen this dear girl.' And she took Gerda in her arms and kissed her with sisterly tenderness, and then she held out her hand to her brother, and they both saw there were tears in the deep-set eyes.

'Pamela? Oh, the little traitress!' ejaculated Dr. Lyall, for Gerda had just told him about her visit. 'Do you know, you naughty woman, that you have stolen my secret? Why, I actually have not dared to come near

you for three days, for fear you should read my face; and now all my precautions have been in vain!

'I had my suspicions,' returned Hester calmly, as she sat down and regarded them with a beaming face—'you need not think you could deceive me, Alick!—of course I had my suspicions; and then Pamela told me. I was rather cross with her at first, for I would much rather have heard it first from you; and then, as Julius was out, I could not resist the temptation of coming to the Vicarage; and now I see I am not wanted.'

'Oh, please do not talk so!' implored Gerda, rather confused by this. 'Do take off Mrs. Vincent's cloak, and make her comfortable,' she continued, with an entreating look at Dr. Lyall.

But Hester shook her head vigorously, and motioned him away.

'I could not stay. Ray is very restless; and I only want to feast my eyes on you both for a moment. Alick dear, go back to Gerda, and let me see you together, to be sure that I have not dreamt this.' And Dr. Lyall, with an amused look, resumed his seat.

‘I suppose I must humour you, Hester; but I warn you that Gerda has feelings. Suppose you turn your attention to me—I am brazen enough for anything. Have I grown taller since? do I look twice the man I was? Bless her dear heart, if she is not actually crying over us!’

‘I am so pleased, so glad!’ returned Hester in a choking voice. ‘Gerda, you do not know what this is to me. All these years I have so longed for him to be happy. He is so good, and he has had such a hard life, and I could do nothing for him; and now—now——’ and her pause was sufficiently suggestive.

‘I am so glad that you are pleased,’ observed Gerda, struggling with her shyness. If only she could be alone with Mrs. Vincent!

Dr. Lyall seemed to understand her thoughts.

‘You must not expect her to say much to-night, Essie. You must get her to yourself, and then she will talk fast enough; but at present we are taking our happiness soberly.’ And then he told Hester about Sir Godfrey’s letter and Mrs. Meredith’s proposed visit.

Mrs. Vincent looked rather alarmed.

'Oh, what a pity ! But they will not make you give Alick up.'

But Gerda's indignant 'No indeed !' soon set her fears at rest. 'No one could do that,' she continued proudly.

Dr. Lyall reserved his expression of gratitude for a more favourable opportunity. Clearly his sister was in the way just now. He was an ardent lover, and these moments with Gerda were precious. Hester had tact enough to know this. She made one or two more pretty speeches, arranged that Gerda should have tea with her the following afternoon, when there should be no tiresome Alick to spoil everything, and then she took her leave, in spite of all Gerda's protests and entreaties.

'If you had only pressed her to stay, she would not have gone,' she said reproachfully when Dr. Lyall re-entered with a radiant look ; 'but you said nothing.'

'I did not want her to stay,' he returned coolly. 'I can see Hester any day I like, and I am sure'—with a mischievous inflection in his voice—'that you would prefer to talk to me.'

But Gerda would not own this.

‘Never mind, I shall take it for granted. I don’t mean always to let you have your own way. But it was sweet of you to say that, darling! So no one will ever make you give me up? It did me good to hear you say that.’

‘How could I say otherwise?’ she replied simply. ‘You would not give me up either, would you, Alick?’ half whispering the word in his ear.

Then he drew her to him with a fond gesture.

‘Alick! I never cared for my name before, but I shall now. Was it very difficult to say, dear? It will come easier with practice. No, I do not believe anything earthly would make me give you up; but I fear I may have to wait for my wife;’ and, though Gerda made no response to this, she feared so too.

Gerda went to Daintree House the next afternoon, and spent a happy hour with Hester, and on this occasion she did not stint her confidence; neither did she refuse to talk of her lover, and she listened to Hester’s praises of that dearly loved brother with a satisfaction that knew no weariness.

'I always felt he was good. I knew it from the first,' she said softly. 'But you have made me understand him better than ever. I only wish I were more worthy of him.'

But Hester had much to say on this point.

'You will suit him exactly—even Pamela says that. And, Gerda, I do feel we shall be real sisters. Alick's wife will be a very important factor in my life, and I warn you that I shall make demands on your sympathy and affection. Must you go?' as Gerda rose from her chair. 'How I wish Alick could have fetched you ; but his time is not his own.'

'I shall see him to-night,' replied Gerda. 'To-morrow mother is expected, and he says he shall leave us together the first evening. Good-bye ; thank you for all you have told me,' and Gerda kissed her with real affection.

'She will be very much to me ; I feel that already,' she said to herself as she walked quickly down the road. 'I am so glad I like his sister, it makes everything nicer. Oh, if only mother will agree with me ; if she will only take him into her heart!' And then, as was natural, Gerda's thoughts relapsed to the subject of her lover's perfections, which

occupied her happily until she reached the Vicarage.

A dark figure was standing on the steps as she opened the gate. For the moment her heart beat faster. But no, it was too tall for Dr. Lyall. Perhaps it was Derrick Vincent. But just then the door opened, and she heard a well-known voice asking for her, and the voice belonged to her cousin Gerard.

‘I am here behind you, Gerard!’ she exclaimed, but her heart sank as she spoke, and he turned at once to greet her.

‘Have you been out this dismal afternoon? It is quite late, but I remember you were always fond of a prow.’

There was a trace of nervousness in Gerard’s voice, and he hardly looked at her as he spoke; and then he busied himself in taking off his great-coat and gloves.

Gerda stood beside him demurely, and then preceded him into the drawing-room; but her face fell a little when she saw it was empty.

‘I suppose Aunt Clare is in the study? She is generally there in the afternoon.’ And she would have gone at once in search of her, but Gerard stopped her.

'There is no hurry, is there? I shall see her presently, and I asked for you.'

Then Gerda followed him reluctantly to the fireside. She had been so happy the minute before, but this moment was cruelly embarrassing to her. Must she tell Gerard, or had he heard already? Would Doris have told him? She glanced at him anxiously. He was nervous—decidedly nervous—but he seemed much as usual. And how well he looked: perhaps she was regarding him more critically this evening; but he certainly was wonderfully handsome.

'I thought you would expect me to look you up,' he said, trying to be at his ease; 'but I have had an awful drive since I have been up in town—not an hour to call my own. I am afraid you have had a bad time of it with Aunt Clare's illness; but you look uncommonly well. I don't think I ever saw you look better——' as though something in her appearance struck him.

'I am very well. Will you sit down, Gerard? Have you heard from mother or Doris?'

'Not since last week. I had a note from

Doris then. Ah, by-the-bye, she says you are going home soon.'

'I don't know; I am not quite sure. Did—did anyone tell you that mother is coming up?'

'No!' with an air of extreme surprise. 'Do you mean that Aunt Honoria will really be able to leave the Hall? I thought'—becoming more perplexed—'that Uncle Godfrey had one of his attacks threatening. How can she leave him? Doris will be frightened to death.' Then he caught sight of Gerda's face; she was looking hot, uncomfortable. And, what was it? There was something underneath this; he could not make her out at all. She did not seem inclined to meet his eyes; she was shy with him; she—good heavens! He had heard that this was a good sign with women. Could she have changed her mind? Had absence done something for him? Never mind about her mother, he must find this out first. 'I asked for you,' he began, stammering over his words; 'I have been longing to see you.' But Gerda interrupted him; she had caught the sudden gleam in his eyes, and her woman's instinct warned

her of danger. She could hear the doubt, the ring of renewed hope in his tone ; she must save him from a second mistake.

‘ Yes, Gerard,’ she said, more calmly than she felt ; ‘ and I wanted to see you, too. I felt there was something you ought to know, that would have to be told you.’ Then the light died out of his face.

‘ What do you mean ?’ he asked suspiciously. ‘ Has anything happened ?’

‘ Everything has happened to me,’ very softly. ‘ Gerard, I am afraid you will be sorry ; but you ought to know it—I am engaged to Dr. Lyall !’

‘ No !’ he returned, springing to his feet. ‘ No, impossible ! And I will not believe it !’ But even as he spoke he knew in the depths of his heart that the thing was true. She had gone from him ; she was out of his reach now and for ever ; but he would never have won her, never !

‘ Ah, but you must believe it,’ she returned gently, very gently. ‘ Gerard dear, I am sorry for your sake that things are so ; but if you knew how happy it has made me——’

Then he sat down again, and she knew

by his expression that he was pulling himself together.

‘I suppose it is true, if you say it,’ he returned slowly; ‘but I am very, very much surprised; somehow I never thought of this. So he did not pull you out of the water for nothing?’ he added bitterly.

Gerda felt that there was no answer to be made to this, so she remained silent; but the tears gathered slowly in her eyes. If Gerard only knew how all this pained her.

‘I ought not to be mean enough to grudge you to the man who has won you,’ he went on presently. ‘You are not the girl to engage yourself to anyone, unless you care for him.’

‘No, Gerard.’

‘So I must wish you joy and all that.’ Here Gerard tugged at his moustache, and looked gloomily in the fire; so it was not to be wondered that his felicitations fell a little flat. ‘He is a lucky fellow, that is all I can say.’ He relapsed into a brown study for a few minutes, and then asked abruptly: ‘What do they say about it at the Hall?’

Gerda shook her head sadly. 'Grand has refused his consent.'

'No! By Jove, has he?'

'Yes; and he is very angry. He told mother that unless I gave up this folly, he would not have me back at the Hall. That is why mother is coming up, because we must see each other.'

'I was afraid there would be a row. Lyall has not much of a pile, has he?'

'Oh no, he is not very well off. He has not long been in practice; that is why Grand is so furious. I am afraid things will not be very smooth with us; but of course, nothing Grand can do or say will alter matters.'

'No; I suppose not.'

'No, indeed; how can anything make a difference? That is why Grand is so foolish. He will only spoil things, and worry mother and Doris to death, and in the end he will be obliged to give way.'

'Well, you must give him time to get used to the idea. Look here, Gerda, I have not played the man this afternoon; but it was so confoundedly sudden, don't you know. It was like having the shower-bath without pulling the string. But I'll promise you one

thing. I will try and make things square with you and Uncle Godfrey.'

'Oh, Gerard, will you really?'

'Well, I will do my best; but you know what an obstinate old fellow he is. I suppose suppressed gout makes a man cantankerous; but certainly Uncle Godfrey does not get more amiable as he grows older.' And here he got up from his chair.

Gerda looked at him in alarm.

'Oh, Gerard, you are not going! What will Aunt Clare say?'

'Give her my love, and tell her I will look her up again soon, but that I could not stay to-night.'

'Not if I ask you to stay?' looking at him sorrowfully; but he shook his head very decidedly.

'Better not. Lyall will be here this evening, will he not?' And Gerda was obliged to own that he would be there. 'I should be rather like the skeleton at the feast. No, thank you.' Gerard spoke a little sullenly, but when he saw the sadness in her eyes, his good heart spoke out. 'Don't look so miserable,' he said, holding her hands in a tight grip, but Gerda did not wince. 'Look here,

I shall get over this all right—fellows always do—so you need not take it to heart. It is no fault of yours. I'll come and see you again, when I am in a better humour. There, God bless you!' He wrung her hand and turned away, and a moment afterwards she heard the hall-door close upon him.

Gerda felt very miserable as she went upstairs; the brief interview had been an ordeal. She was tasting at this moment the bitterness which a sensitive and unselfish nature must always experience at witnessing inevitable pain. If only Gerard could be happy, too! That was her inward cry. But at present he must suffer; she could do nothing to help him! For after all, life is full of this esoteric misery—this futile longing to take some heavy burden on our own shoulders, that can only be borne by the beloved object. Deep grief is always lonely grief. Each human heart has its holy of holies, and its lowest depths where no sympathy can fully enter. Only the one Divine Man could suffer vicariously, could drink the accumulated bitterness of human suffering; but with all others, each

must bear his or her heaviest burden along the toilsome path of life.

When Dr. Lyall came that evening, he detected at once the cloud on Gerda's brow.

Mrs. Glyn and Bessie were in the room, and he could find no opportunity to question her, until he took his leave and she followed him into the hall. It was an attention that he seemed always to expect of her. 'You must let Dr. Lyall out,' Mrs. Glyn had said to her the first night, and since then she had done so unasked.

'What is it, dear?' he asked anxiously, as he drew her into the empty dining-room, for his keen eyes had detected the marks of recent tears.

'Gerard has been here,' she whispered. Then his arm pressed her more closely.

'Was it so bad as all that, darling?'

'It was certainly very bad. Poor Gerard, he did look so unhappy! He had not expected it in the least, and he could not quite hide what he felt.'

'Oh, I see.' And Dr. Lyall's face was rather grave.

'But he was so good and dear with it all. He has promised to talk to Grand, and to

try to soften him ; and Gerard always does what he says.'

'I should imagine so. He is a fine fellow—a thoroughly good fellow. When I think of it, I cannot help wondering at my own good luck. Are you sure you have done well for yourself?'—putting his hand gently under her chin to look into her eyes—'a handsome fellow like Hamlyn, and rich, too, and a poor, shabby doctor ;' but Gerda shook herself free with much dignity.

'I will not have you talk in that way ; it is not right to me or to yourself. If you were ten times poorer—if you had not a penny in the world—it would make no difference, as long as you are you, and I am myself !'

'You are right, darling ; that was well said. Poor Hamlyn, I pity him with all my heart ! I would not change places with any man on earth. Now bid me good-night.' But it was some minutes after this that the gate of St. Jude's Vicarage closed on Dr. Lyall.



CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. MEREDITH CAPITULATES.

‘In no relation does woman exercise so deep an influence, both immediately and prospectively, as in a mother.’—
CARTER.

‘Men have marble, women waxen minds,
And therefore are they form’d as marble will.’

SHAKESPEARE.

MRS. MEREDITH arrived the next morning, and Dr. Lyall kept his resolution of leaving the mother and daughter together; but, after all, Gerda did not get her mother to herself until the evening was nearly over.

Mrs. Meredith had not seen her sister for more than two years, and she was much shocked at the delicacy of her appearance.

‘Clare looks ten years older,’ she said very seriously, when she was alone with her brother-in-law; ‘actually there are gray

streaks in her hair, and she is so dreadfully worn and thin ;' and there was a reproachful expression in her eyes, as though he were somehow to blame for this.

'We are none of us younger,' he returned, with a shrug of his shoulders. 'You are rather thin yourself, Honoria. I think you forget all that Clare has been through. The parting with Walter has tried her much.'

'But you have good accounts of him.'

'Well, we have only heard twice. He had been very sea-sick, but was getting on his legs again. But he wrote cheerfully.'

And then Mr. Glyn muttered an excuse about some letters and went off to his study. A *tête-à-tête* with his sister-in-law was not much to his taste ; she had a habit of implying in a mild, ladylike way that Clare had not done well for herself in marrying him. Honoria's want of tact and his own stubborn stiff-neckedness did not allow of much sympathy between them ; and Clare always owned to herself sorrowfully that Horace never appeared at his best when her sister stayed at the Vicarage.

The sisters were much overcome at meeting ; even Clare shed a few tears, as she

lay on the couch with Honoria beside her. Gerda had left them together for a long time, and had carried off Bessie.

‘Mother will talk about Walter, and that will do Aunt Clare good,’ she said, as she went to the room prepared for Mrs. Meredith and unpacked her mother’s things and arranged them carefully. Mrs. Meredith was accustomed to be waited upon, and was always helpless without her maid.

Gerda busied herself very cheerfully. It was delightful to feel that her mother was in the house.

‘Aunt Clare is as dear as possible, but no one can replace one’s mother,’ she thought, as she smoothed the dress that Roberts had carefully placed for her mistress to wear that night.

Mrs. Meredith was in no hurry for that conversation with her daughter; she would willingly have postponed it until the next day, but Gerda’s youthful eagerness could brook no delay. The moment her aunt Clare had retired under Bessie’s supervision, she carried off her mother to her room.

‘No one will interrupt us here, and I cannot wait any longer,’ she said impetu-

ously ; and then she drew up the easy-chair to the fire, and found herself a stool at her mother's feet.

But when half an hour had passed, she was still listening with a pained expression to Mrs. Meredith's lugubrious sentences, and was obliged to admit that as yet she had found no comfort. Gerda had to pay the penalty of being a stronger woman than her mother. Mrs. Meredith's soft, pliable nature was sadly deficient in backbone ; her daughter's courage and independent spirit filled her with dismay. At no time in her life had she ever ventured to assert her own will against her father.

Gerda was only a girl, and she loved her mother dearly ; but she was keenly and acutely alive to her deficiencies. She might win her to her side eventually—Honorina had always been guided by her young daughters—but of what avail was such a timorous ally ?

‘ Poor dear mother ! ’ she sighed ; and then she summoned up patience to wait until those long, rambling explanations—those disjointed statements and jumbled-up facts—had flowed like a turbid stream from Mrs. Meredith's

troubled soul. Only once she checked her a little haughtily :

‘ Let us keep to the point, mother ; we are not talking about Gerard. Gerard has nothing in the world to do with my engagement to Dr. Lyall.’

‘ No, of course not,’ replied Mrs. Meredith, rather frightened at this stern rebuke. ‘ But you need not be so sharp with me, Gerda ; I am quite unhappy enough as it is. I was only telling you that, in my opinion and Doris’s, Gerard would be far preferable as a lover ; if I remember—but I am sure I did not notice him much—Dr. Lyall is not even good-looking.’

Gerda uttered an impatient exclamation, but she was too proud to refute this. Their opinion should be nothing to her.

‘ That is what Doris said directly. She thought him a little rough in appearance—not trim and well turned out like Gerard. But, then, Gerard has all his coats from Bond Street, and, of course,’ dolorously, ‘ Dr. Lyall has to content himself with a second-class tailor.’

No answer ; only an ominous tightening of Gerda’s lips.

‘It is better for you to know what we all think,’ went on Mrs. Meredith, floundering still deeper into the Slough of Despond. ‘And then he is so much older—he is thirty-two, is he not?’

‘Nearly thirty-three.’

‘And you are only one-and-twenty. That is eleven—twelve years difference! You may be left a widow with a large family before you are forty. I do not believe medical men live as long as other people; they work so hard, and going out at night in all weathers undermines their constitution; and then what would you do?’

‘Mother,’ returned Gerda, in her clear, indignant young voice, ‘I looked for opposition and want of sympathy, for of course Grand has been talking to you, but I hardly expected this. You are not fair on—’ she hesitated, tried to say ‘Alick,’ and substituted ‘him’ rather lamely.

‘My dear child!’

‘I suppose I must hear what my mother chooses to say to me, but it is very hard to bear. Dr. Lyall is not young; he is not good-looking; he is poor, and has to work hard; but in spite of all these defects—these

unpardonable defects in yours and Grand's and Doris's eyes—he is the only man I could ever bring myself to marry.'

'Dear me, Gerda, are you quite sure of that?'—shrinking a little at her daughter's tone.

'Am I sure that I am on this stool at your feet? Oh, mother, what has made you so hard? When you married my father did you do so because he was young and handsome, and had expectations from his uncle, Lord Galverston?'

Then, at this appeal, the widow's heart melted within her. For none of these reasons had she married her Algy.

'I married him because we loved each other dearly,' she sobbed, for she still mourned for him as faithfully as ever.

'Just so; and that is why I shall marry Alick,' and this time she brought out the name triumphantly. 'I shall marry him because I love and honour and respect him above all other men.'

Then, as Mrs. Meredith saw the wonderful light in her child's eyes, she felt herself vanquished. If this were really true—if

Gerda had really given her whole heart, she had nothing more to say.

‘I never thought you cared for him in that way,’ rather feebly.

‘Ah, but you know now. I am showing you all that is in my heart. Mother, you will be good to us, whatever Grand may do? Doris and I have no father.’

Then Mrs. Meredith sobbed aloud, and clasped her daughter in her arms.

‘Don’t say any more, darling; I cannot bear it. No one shall come between me and my Algy’s children. You are so like him, Gerda; you have got his nose and chin, and when you smile you remind me of him. You must not be vexed with me because I wanted you to have Gerard. It was only because I would have smoothed your path, and have had everything easy for you. Is it a sin to be ambitious for my children? I want nothing for myself—only for you and Doris.’

‘Yes, mother dear, I know that,’ and Gerda nestled up to her more closely. ‘I am not blaming you—I am not even blaming Grand, although he is so cruel to me; I only want you to look at things with my eyes.’

‘I will try, Gerda,’ very meekly.

‘Then will you believe that I am not a bit anxious about my future life? I know that things will be different. I shall have no Roberts to see to my dresses, no horses or carriages for my own use; I shall miss a hundred little luxuries to which I have become accustomed; but what of that? Perhaps my life will be hard’—pausing thoughtfully over her words—‘he—he has never promised that it would be easy. It may even be’—here she shuddered—‘that you are right in your dreadful prophecy, and I may be left a widow. What then? Are there no other widows in this sad, sad world? And I shall have had my life—one can only live once,’ finished Gerda with solemnity.

No wonder Mrs. Meredith regarded her daughter with perplexity and awe. She was a simple woman, and took her life simply. To love her children—to obey and humour her old father, and never to forget that she was a Hamlyn—this was her creed!

The conversation flowed more smoothly after this. Mrs. Meredith had consented to lower her flag, and now a mild interest began to awake within her; she became curious on the subject of Dr. Lyall’s house, his family

connections, and the extent of his practice ; and Gerda was quite willing to enlighten her.

After all, Mrs. Meredith was a woman, and a kind-hearted woman, too. Any real romance, any love-story, stirred her pulses, as an old war-horse is moved by a distant trumpet, and she could not listen to her daughter without pleasurable excitement. For the next fortnight she would be safe from Sir Godfrey's flouts and sneers ; for fourteen whole days she might give herself up to her child's interest.

'Roadside ? Is that the name of Dr. Lyall's house ?' she asked.

'Yes ; but you will not think much of it. It is a roomy, shabby old house ; and the furniture is shabby, too.'

Then Mrs. Meredith sighed. Her father had once promised her that when Gerard married, the drawing-room and morning-room, and a suite of apartments upstairs called the Ladies' Gallery, should be re-furnished. But Gerda had refused all this magnificence. The Hamlyn diamonds would never repose on her white neck ; neither would she inhabit the Ladies' Gallery.

'Are you tired, mother dear ? Am I

keeping you up too late?' asked Gerda, struck by the weariness in Mrs. Meredith's eyes.

'I think I am tired,' returned the poor woman plaintively; but it was not physical fatigue that made her eyes so heavy. And then Gerda blamed herself in no measured terms for her selfishness.

'You must let me stay and help you; you must not miss Roberts,' she pleaded. And Mrs. Meredith did not refuse her help. After all, it was sweet to feel her child's hands about her again. Gerda's soft touch seemed to tranquillize her, and allay the vague pain that she still felt.

'If it be for her happiness, if he be really all she imagines him to be,' she said to herself, as she stretched her tired limbs under the quilt, 'I will not go against them. Clare speaks highly of him.' And then in the darkness she felt for her wedding-ring. How thin and worn it was after all these years, since Algy had placed it on her finger! 'She is very like him,' she murmured, as she grew more drowsy; and then she fell asleep.

Dr. Lyall had promised to pay his respects as early in the afternoon as possible, and Clare

had playfully but peremptorily desired that no one should enter the drawing-room.

‘Honorina must sit in state to receive him,’ she said, as her husband seemed inclined to contradict this. ‘There must be no curious eyes, no eavesdropping, no impertinent callers, to mar the solemnity of the occasion.’

‘I wish you would not talk so, Clare,’ remonstrated her sister nervously. She had dressed herself very carefully, and the little flush on her face made her look quite young and handsome. ‘If I only knew what to say to him!’ she added, dropping some stitches in her agitation. ‘It was bad enough talking to Gerda last night, but this is a hundred times worse. I never could manage men—not even Algy.’ And in this she was right. The young captain of hussars had tyrannized royally over his loving wife. As Sir Godfrey had once told her, ‘Honorina was born to be a slave’; and in her secret soul she had owned that this also was the truth.

‘Well, I do not envy you,’ returned Clare maliciously, for she was not above teasing her sister. ‘Dr. Lyall can be very dignified when he likes. He is not one of those pliant, easy-tempered men, who can be humoured.

He has strong opinions on every point, and he lets you know them.'

'Oh, indeed?' And Honoria's hands fumbled still more nervously at her knitting.

'Yes; and of course my father's treatment has not sweetened his temper. I should not wonder if he be a little sarcastic at your expense. You see, he is not a man to be beaten without showing fight, and——'

'Oh, do go away, Clare! You are making me positively ill. I shall not be able to speak to him. I—— Oh dear! oh dear! is that his ring? Gerda'—as that young lady entered—'do please look out of the window, and tell me if a doctor's brougham is at the door.'

'No, mother dear. But of course he has walked; he always does here.'

Then Mrs. Meredith was obliged to lay aside her work. Her hands shook so she could hardly hold the needles. Clare flashed a naughty glance at her as she left the room. She was not too weak to enjoy her little joke.

Dr. Lyall paused to compliment her on her looks.

'We have done you a world of good, Mrs. Glyn,' he observed significantly.

‘My sister is in there,’ she returned ; and then she looked straight at him with a meaning smile. ‘She is very nervous, poor dear ! Honoria is always nervous. As you are strong, be merciful.’ And then she nodded to him, and entered her husband’s study.

Dr. Lyall smiled also. He was not the least nervous ; on the contrary, he was delighted that Gerda’s mother was there. Gerda advanced to meet him as usual, and put out her hand ; but Dr. Lyall took more than that.

‘Surely you do not mind your mother ?’ he remonstrated, as she blushed almost painfully at this unexpected greeting ; and then he turned to Mrs. Meredith. ‘I hope you are going to be good to me,’ he said simply, as he shook hands with her.

Mrs. Meredith was a weak woman with regard to backbone, but she was not without common-sense, and from that moment she respected her daughter for her choice. When Dr. Lyall looked her in the face with those clear, honest eyes, and spoke those few words, she capitulated in a moment.

‘I do hope you will be good to me, and to Gerda too,’ he continued, still standing before

her with quiet dignity, 'and that you will be my friend with Sir Godfrey.'

Mrs. Meredith stammered something not perfectly audible, and he saw at once that Mrs. Glyn was right, and that she was excessively nervous.

'You must come and help me talk to your mother,' he said, putting a chair for Gerda, and placing himself on the couch between them. 'We are like people speaking a different language at present, we need an interpreter, do we not, Mrs. Meredith?'

Then she explained, not without dignity, that her position was a difficult one; in siding with her child she had to oppose her father. 'And you know,' in her plaintive, lady-like voice, 'that my children and I are dependent upon him.'

'Yes, I know that; Gerda has told me so already.' Then he took the girl's hand in his. 'But all the same, you are her mother—her very nearest and dearest relative—and it is to you that I must apply after Sir Godfrey's refusal. Surely'—speaking very persuasively—'you will not deny me this?' and Mrs. Meredith felt the touch of her daughter's fingers very close to hers.

‘It is not for me to refuse it,’ she said a little piteously. ‘Gerda tells me that her happiness depends on you.’

‘I hope so—I believe so; even as mine depends on her. Not for worlds would I deny this. Then will you try to put up with my defects for her sake?’

‘Your defects, Dr. Lyall?’

‘Yes; are they not grievous defects?’ smiling at her obvious perplexity. ‘Are you so unworldly yourself, Mrs. Meredith, that you do not understand that poverty, or at least lack of wealth, is a heinous sin?’

‘Ah, I see now what you mean.’

‘Yes, and you feel the truth of my words, though you are too kind to say so; but at least I will promise you this, that I will do all that a man can do to augment my income.’ And then he explained to her frankly the extent of his resources, and his views for the future.

‘Would you not like me to leave you with mother?’ Gerda had whispered once, for all this practical talk was a little embarrassing. But he shook his head.

‘No, no. Why should you go? Is not this your business as much as it is mine? Do

you want me to believe that my affairs do not interest you?' and then she had been compelled to yield.

Dr. Lyall was in one of his quiet, masterful moods, when his will was felt to be law. His patients knew these moods well.

'If I might be allowed to state my wishes,' he continued, after a little more talk, 'it would be that Gerda accompanies you on your return to the Hall.'

'But I am going home in a fortnight, Dr. Lyall.'

'So I understood. Well, Mrs. Glyn is so much stronger that Gerda can be spared by then. You are surprised,' as the girl looked at him mutely; 'you think it a doubtful compliment that I should propose your going so soon. But I am thinking of the future. I want Sir Godfrey to become reconciled to the idea of our engagement.'

'I am afraid,' rather dubiously, 'that there will be little peace for any of us if I take Gerda home.'

'Oh, you must not damp our courage in that way,' he returned cheerfully, 'for Gerda and I have made up our minds to be brave. You have no idea what time and a little

perseverance will do. But I was going to propose another plan, if you will not think me over-bold. Why should I not escort Mrs. Glyn to the Hall, as she is not strong enough to travel alone, and then I can have an interview with Sir Godfrey ?'

'Oh, mother!' exclaimed Gerda breathlessly, for this idea was too delightful altogether.

But Mrs. Meredith merely looked unhappy.

'I do not know how to answer you,' she said hurriedly. 'My father is not easy to manage ; he may not be inclined to welcome you. It is always best to speak the truth, Dr. Lyall, and I can offer you no hope that your visit will be a pleasant one.'

'I will take my chance of that,' he returned briskly. 'Sir Godfrey can hardly refuse to see me after so long a journey. Now I am afraid I must not keep my patients waiting any longer. I believe my sister will do herself the pleasure of calling on you, Mrs. Meredith.'

'We have met already at Chesterton, have we not ?'

'Oh, you mean Pamela ; but I was speaking of my sister, Mrs. Vincent.'

Then Mrs. Meredith replied very graciously that she would be glad to make Mrs. Vincent's acquaintanceship.

'Is the coast clear?—has the enemy retired?' asked Clare, peeping cautiously into the room. Gerda was exchanging a few last words with her lover. 'Oh, I see you are alone. Well, what do you think of him, Honoria?'

'He is far nicer than I expected.'

'Oh, I was sure of that.'

'He is not good-looking, but he is very gentlemanly; and, then, he has such quiet manners.'

'In fact, you found him irresistible.'

'Well, not quite that; but I am sure that I shall like him. And dear Gerda is so happy; and, then, he was so gentle with us both, although it was easy to see that he means to hold his own. Altogether, he is rather out of the common.'

And Clare professed herself perfectly pleased with this eulogium.

'I like your mother, dear,' observed D Lyall, as Gerda looked appealingly at him; 'she is just my idea of an old-fashioned gentlewoman. I know now from whom you

have got your pretty manners. Hester will be delighted with her.'

'You managed her beautifully.'

'Did I? I was rather afraid that I was a little masterful. Poor Mrs. Meredith! we shall give her a good deal of anxiety. She seems terribly afraid of Sir Godfrey.'

'She has been afraid of him all her life.'

'I can imagine that; her nature is a timorous one. We must not put too great a strain upon her. I shall have to take things in my own hand—I can see that.'

'Shall you really come down with Aunt Clare?'

'We will settle that presently. Seven weeks is a long time, and a good deal may happen before then.'

But Dr. Lyall had no idea, as he said this, that his words were a true prophecy, and that much would happen before he paid that visit to Chesterton Hall.



CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. HAKE HAS AN IDEA.

‘When thou hast been compelled by circumstances to be disturbed in a manner, quickly return to thyself and do not continue out of tune longer than the compulsion lasts ; for thou wilt have more mastery over the harmony by continually recurring to it.’—M. AURELIUS ANTONINUS.

GERARD’S next visit to St. Jude’s Vicarage was rather inopportune ; Gerda was spending the evening at Daintree House, and they did not meet. Gerard left her a message ; he would not wait for her return. He was going down to Chesterton the next day, and he was not sure when he should be in town again.

‘He was as nice as possible,’ observed Mrs. Meredith ; ‘but both Clare and I thought him rather out of spirits. He took a great deal of notice of Janie and Nora,

and talked most about Walter, so of course Clare was delighted with him.'

'And he is going down to the Hall to-morrow?' returned Gerda thoughtfully.

Dr. Lyall had just taken his leave, and she stood by the fire, with her fur cloak just dropping from her shoulders. She was in her favourite blue velveteen dress, and looked more like a Saxon princess than ever.

'She is very pretty,' thought the mother with a sigh; 'she is far prettier than she used to be.' But she only remarked aloud: 'You will scorch your dress if you stand so close to the fire. Yes, he is going down by the 2.15 train; he means to take them by surprise. It is all his thoughtfulness for Doris. He says it is a shame to leave the poor little thing alone any longer.'

'That is so like Gerard,' was Gerda's only answer; and then they both went upstairs.

Gerard had another reason besides his kind wish to cheer the forlorn little damsel, Doris. Cromehurst was rather too near London for his peace of mind. Gerard was not in an enviable state of mind just now; he felt sore and injured. The world—his own little world—had treated him badly.

His great-uncle had taken advantage of his easy nature and disengaged affections to cajole and wheedle him into proposing to Gerda. He had consented to try his luck, as he called it, and had been refused with covert amusement and a trifle of disdain ; whereupon, the sturdy tenacity of his bulldog British nature had suddenly discovered that it was a disgrace to be beaten. He would try again ; and, lo and behold, the play had waxed grim earnest. Gerard had to learn by painful experience that playing with sharp-edged tools is a dangerous game — the weapons had been turned against himself ; and at the moment he lost her he would have given up anything he had to win her for his wife !

Gerard's nature was by no means a weak one, and after the first he was not the man to cry out because his desire had not been granted. He had lived through a few bad moments while Gerda had informed him of her engagement, and in the fierceness of his pain he had not been able to refrain from some expression of regret and dismay. He had not played the man, as he had said himself, and now, as discretion is the better part of

valour, he felt that it behoved him to seek safety in flight.

A burnt child dreads the fire, and poor Gerard had unhappily been severely scorched. But he was not without his consolations. 'We are never so happy or unhappy as we suppose,' wrote the wise and witty Queen of Roumania; and somehow in that brusque statement she hit on a wide truth. There are margins of possibilities to most human troubles to be filled up by minor or major consolations; and even a luckless lover need not go downcast and disquieted like Malvolio, while there are bright eyes and kind hearts ready to cheer the sufferer. As Gerard took possession of his seat in the comfortable first-class compartment and read his *Times* he was not wholly miserable. Doris would be kind to him, he thought. She would look at him with blue, tear-laden eyes while he unfolded his tale of grievances; he could hear her 'Poor Gerard!' quite clearly. Yes, she was a dear good child, and he was very fond of her; how pleased she would be to see him! She would come running out to meet him, with Flip and Flop, his fox-terriers, behind her. Somehow, when Doris came

flying down the walk, with her curly hair all ruffled by the wind, and her pretty girlish hands stretched out to him, he always felt inclined to treat her like a child, and take her in his arms and kiss her. But he had never ventured on such a liberty. With all her childishness and innocent naïveté, Doris was a dignified little person, and she would have resented any liberty, even from her dear Gerard. Mrs. Meredith had brought up her daughters well; they were perhaps a trifle stiff in their behaviour to the other sex. Men who visited at the Hall found it impossible to begin a flirtation. 'They have no idea, don't you know,' observed one proverbial lady-killer—Captain Drummond—to Charlie Seymour, in the gossip of the smoking-room. 'I tried the elder one first—she is most to my taste—but she did not seem to see it at all; and as for the other one—Miss Doris—she opened her eyes until they were double their size, and said: "You really can't mean what you are saying, Captain Drummond? Of course, it is only fun;" and that sort of thing shuts a man up, don't you know.'

'No, I don't know,' replied Charlie rather

shortly, for he was not pleased at this burst of confidence. 'I never tried it on either of them. They are too awfully jolly for that, don't you know'—with a sly caricature of Captain Drummond's style.

Drummond's 'don't you knows' were slightly tedious to his friends.

Gerard felt quite soothed as he contemplated this little picture, and he was able to enjoy a capital leading article. Even his long walk gave him pleasure. After Bond Street and St. James's it was pleasant to see the budding hedgerows and to hear the twittering of birds busy with family cares. It was the last day of March, and there was an April brightness in the clear blue sky, and soft evening lights.

'Is that yourself, Squire?' observed old Giles Andover, leaning over his cottage gate to inspect village affairs and exchange greetings with his neighbours.

Sir Godfrey was always Sir Godfrey, but of late years Gerard had been known as the Squire.

'Haven't they sent to fetch thee from the station?'

'No, Giles. I have not told them I was

coming. I thought I would walk up and give them a surprise.'

'Aye, aye ; that wasn't a bad notion, Squire. Miss went by just now with the whole pack of dogs. She stopped to speak to my missus. Well, good-evening ! Maybe ye'll drop in next time you pass and give us a bit of Lunnon news.' For the young Squire was very popular in the village. Every man, woman, and child had a good word for him.

'After all, other fellows would think I am to be envied,' thought Gerard as he walked on towards the Hall.

Below him lay a belt of green meadows, with the red cattle, so dear to Sir Godfrey's heart, feeding on the thick juicy herbage.

'All this will come to me before many years are over. A title, a good house, and sufficient money to keep things going. I suppose most men would be satisfied. And yet that girl has made such a fool of me that I don't seem to have heart for anything.' He stopped, twirled his stick fiercely, then stopped to inspect a broken paling. 'Smedley ought to have had this mended long ago,' he said to himself quite angrily. 'He takes advantage of Uncle Godfrey. Master Smedley

shall smart for this.' Then he walked on more briskly. 'I am bound to get over it,' he went on; 'fellows always do. One cannot go on year after year wanting to cut one's throat; it is against nature. I agree with that old buffer—what's his name—"What care I how fair she be, if she be not fair for me?" But all the same'—with a groan—'it is precious bad while it lasts.' Gerard broke off here, not because he had exhausted his moralizing, but because his eyes had caught sight of a blue gown behind the great deodora at the side of the house. He was sure the dress belonged to Doris, though she was still at some distance from him, and as he turned off the gravel path and crossed the lawn he could see her more distinctly. She was sitting on the garden seat with her back towards him. She had a gray deer-stalker's hat on her curly head, and she was talking in an audible voice to Sultan, Gerard's big black retriever.

Some of Gerard's old boyish mischief woke up at this sight. He dearly loved to startle Doris. She always screamed so deliciously. So he crept stealthily round the deodora and waited his opportunity.

But as he lurked within ear-shot, such a

sad little voice reached him. Doris was pulling Sultan's glossy ears and looking into the dog's wistful brown eyes.

'You miss him, too, don't you, Sultan? It is dreadfully dreary without Gerard. It is not home a bit; it is nothing but a big, dismal old Hall. What shall we do to comfort him, dear? He will be so unhappy; and yet there is nothing that we would not do for him — nothing. Oh! oh! oh!' — as Sultan wriggled out of her hands with a joyous bark, and a big gray figure emerged from the deodora.

'Good-evening, Doey! Have I given you a turn? Why, you foolish child, have I really startled you?' And Gerard's voice had a concerned tone. Doris had not screamed, had not flown to him. She had jumped from her seat as though she had been shot, and her cheeks were quite white and her lips trembling. It was evident, even to his inexperienced eyes, that she was very much startled indeed.

'Why—why—how long have you been there?' she gasped.

'Only a minute. I thought it would be such a joke to see you start, but it doesn't

seem to have agreed with you. Why on earth are you so scared ?' And Gerard looked at her quite mystified. This was not the reception he had expected ; he had never seen Doris look pale before, except once, when she had turned faint in a hot crowded church, and he had carried her out. Was she faint now ? Her lips were pressed tightly together, and there was a pained look in her eyes.

'Oh, come now,' he said soothingly, 'I shall think you are not glad to see me. You were far kinder to Sultan. What was that you were saying to him about me—eh—what ?' For Doris had roused from her stupor now, and was actually stamping her little foot at him.

'How dare you—how dare you listen to what I was saying,' she panted, 'when I thought you were a hundred miles away ? I will not look at you ; I will not speak to you !' And Doris burst into a flood of passionate tears, and ran into the house, leaving Gerard in a state of amazement bordering on stupefaction.

'Good heavens !' he said to himself. 'Has the child lost her senses ?' Never in all the

years that he had known her, which was from her babyhood, had Doris ever been angry with him before. He could not—he simply could not—remember hearing a cross word from her lips.

If this were the consolation vouchsafed to him, he might as well take the next train back to London. Gerard was waxing irate with disappointment; the ways of women were inscrutable, he told himself, as he kicked the stones at his feet somewhat sulkily. Sultan, who had exhausted his raptures, and had met with no response, stood wagging his tail feebly, and looking at him with reproachful adoration.

‘If women fail, dogs are true,’ he seemed to say; and then he lay down on the gravel with that mute unreasoning patience which seems inherent in canine nature.

Gerard dropped his stick; then he picked it up and patted Sultan; and then they stalked solemnly side by side into the Hall. But Gerard was not to be deprived of all consolation, though it was to come to him in an unexpected form. For lo and behold! as he walked in at the open door, a comely substantial figure emerged from behind the

farther screen, and Mrs. Hake's pleasant, good-tempered face beamed on him.

'Good gracious, Mr. Hamlyn! have you arrived in a balloon? I have been sitting with Sir Godfrey for nearly an hour, and he told me you were still in London. But here you are, as large as life, or larger!'

'I should say larger. Yes, here I am, and how's the Captain?'

'Oh, Lionel is always well; nothing ever ails him. Do you know where Doris is? Sir Godfrey told me to find her, and ask her for some tea.'

'She was in the garden just now. She is taking off her hat, I believe; but there is no need to wait for her. I shall be glad of some tea, too;' and Gerard pulled the bell and gave his orders. 'And look sharp about it, Stephens,' he finished. 'And, I say,' calling the footman back, 'you need not mention to Sir Godfrey that I am here. I will go to the library myself presently. Just bring the tea, and don't keep us waiting.' And, as the young Squire's word was law at the Hall, Mrs. Hake soon found herself ensconced at the low tea-table, with Gerard in a hammock chair beside her. 'It is like

old times, having you to make tea for me, Mrs. Hake,' observed Gerard, with some return of cheerfulness.

He and Mrs. Hake were good friends. She was a sociable, even-tempered woman, and had no difficult ways with her; she was always the same; she had no variable moods; no impertinent little tricks to play upon confiding friends. Her humour was broad and sweet-tempered too; and though she had a will of her own, she could exercise it without malice. Gerard was a great favourite of hers, and in her opinion Gerda was hardly good enough for him. For the last hour she had been enduring Sir Godfrey's bitter monologue of lamentation, but in her heart she had not fully sympathized with him. She liked Dr. Lyall, and she thought Gerda had not done so amiss after all; but she had had the tact to keep this opinion to herself.

'You will not find your uncle in the best of tempers,' she said significantly, as she gave Gerard a cup of tea. 'He is very much put out about your cousin's engagement.'

Mrs. Hake had hesitated at first to intro-

duce the subject. She was quite aware of the reason for Mr. Hamlyn's unusual glumness, but she had made up her mind at last that it would be well to say something.

‘Of course she might have done better for herself in a worldly point of view.’

‘Perhaps so.’

‘But all the same Dr. Lyall is one of the nicest men I know.’

‘So they say ; but he is almost a stranger to me. Still, I liked what I saw of him.’

‘Oh, to be sure, he only came to the Hall three or four times, but he was more than a week at Braeside. We got quite intimate before he left us. Lionel is devoted to him ; he was quite excited when Doris told him about the engagement.’

Mrs. Hake paused, and poured herself out another cup of tea. She felt that she had said enough on that subject. Gerard's face did not invite sympathy, and though she was sorry for him, she was wise enough to know that his wound was too recent to bear even a word. Gerard's disappointment was known at Braeside ; Sir Godfrey had made no secret of it. She must bide her time until she could think of some way to help him ; and then

again she fell to wondering what had detained Doris.

Gerard thought he would make a clean breast of it; so he narrated briefly his practical joke, and Doris's odd behaviour.

'I could not make her out at all,' he finished; and Mrs. Hake's eyes began to gleam with suppressed amusement.

Mrs. Hake was a match-maker by nature. She always told her friends that she was born to arrange other people's matrimonial affairs. She had a singular genius for detecting future possibilities. Before two young people had awakened to the fact that they were in sympathy with each other, Mrs. Hake had scented orange-blossoms, and had seen the bride and bridegroom drive off from the church door. But there was no vulgar eagerness in the way she worked. No laboured contrivances; nothing but the most delicate tact. In her own words, she was quick to see her opportunity, and to take it.

'You may laugh at me, and call me whatever names you like,' she said once to her husband; 'but it is no crime to like to see people happy.'

'But all the same, even Lyall says you

are an inveterate match-maker. He spotted you at once.'

'Yes, but he had no disagreeable reserve in his thoughts when he said it. Ah, you may jeer, Lionel, but how many young people have to thank me for their happiness!'

'Oh, draw it mild, Gertie! You know you ought to be ashamed of yourself about that Eardley affair. I declare I dare not look old Eardley in the face when I meet him.'

'And yet what have I done?' replied his wife demurely. 'I only said to Mr. Broughton, "I think Alice is practising in the drawing-room;" and before I could say another word he was across the passage. Poor old Mr. Eardley! Did he think Alice was never to have a husband? If you had only seen Mr. Broughton's face when he bade me good-bye that evening! I really thought he was going to kiss me in his gratitude.'

'I should like to have seen him do it,' growled Captain Hake, lighting his cigar; for Gertrude's husband was not devoid of jealousy. He would hint sometimes to his wife that she need not make herself so con-

foundedly agreeable to everyone; and yet in his heart he was secretly proud of her popularity.

‘Not a man of them can resist Gertie,’ he would say. ‘Even the old Crusader—as we call him down here—Sir Godfrey, makes her pretty speeches. Don’t they wish they could get a wife like her, that’s all!’ and Captain Hake marched off chuckling to himself.

So, as Gerard innocently related this little episode, Mrs. Hake’s fine eyes began to sparkle and to gleam. Doris was her special favourite. There was little or no sympathy between her and Gerda; the girl’s dreaminess and pretty, immature philosophy jarred on the elder woman’s practical matter-of-fact wisdom.

‘With all her fine speeches, Gerda is a goose,’ she would say. But with her Doris was a petted confidante. If only Doris could be the future Lady Hamlyn, how charming, how altogether desirable that would be for the mistress of Braeside! But, to do her justice, Mrs. Hake was not selfish. She had a dim idea—had long had it—that Doris was not always as happy as she seemed. At times she had detected a wistful, almost a troubled look in her eyes.

‘I do not think Doris has been quite herself lately,’ she said, a little seriously, when Gerard had finished ; but she did not look at him as she spoke.

‘Not quite well, do you mean?’

‘Oh, I believe she is well! Doris is perfectly healthy, but she has not seemed in her usual spirits. You know, Mr. Hamlyn, Doris is quite my favourite. I know most people admire Gerda most, but Doris has such a sweet little face. She is so charmingly young and fresh ; and then she is so humble-minded, so utterly unconscious of her own attractions.’

‘You are perfectly right,’ returned Gerard, with a pleased look ; ‘she is a dear little thing.’

‘Yes, but she is more than that,’ almost solemnly. ‘There is more in Doris than people think ; she is transparent, and yet she is deep.’

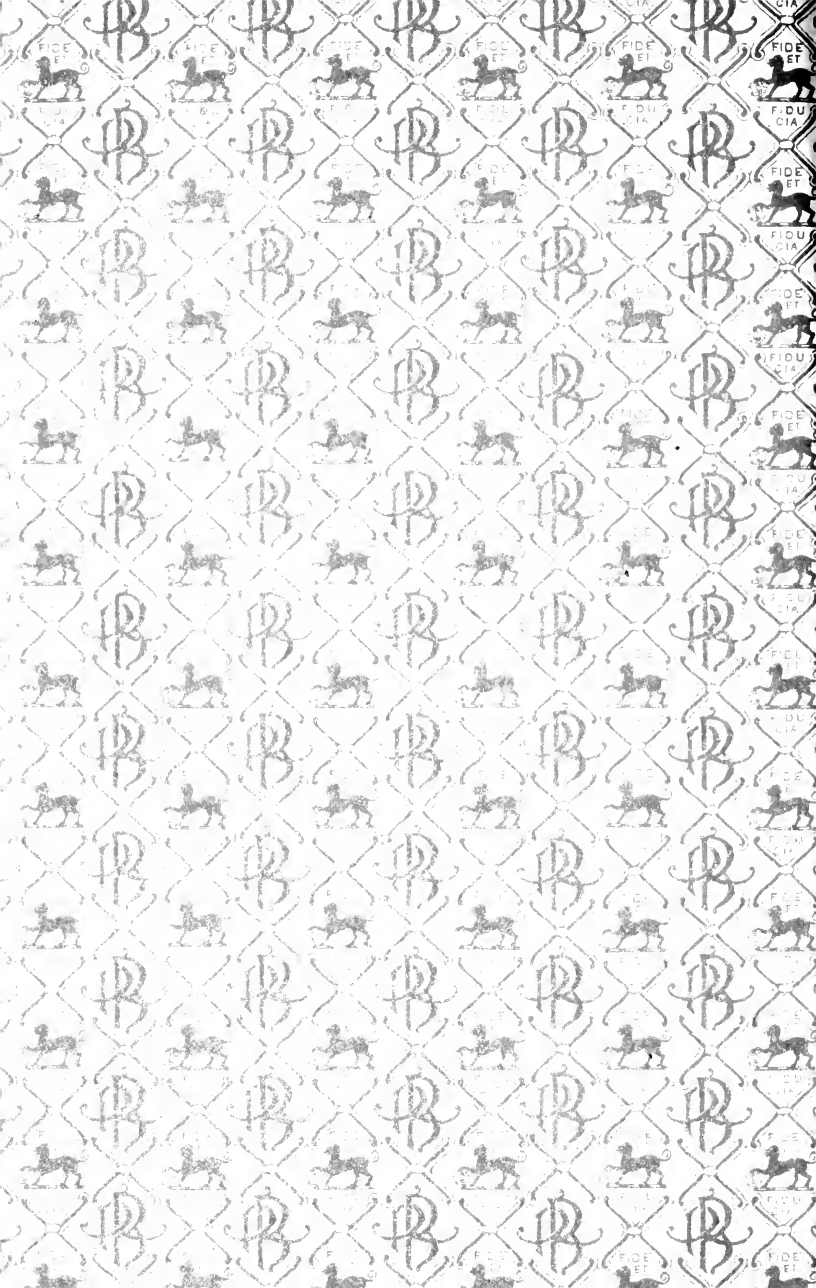
‘Isn’t that rather a paradox, Mrs. Hake?’ for Gerard was amused at this eloquent praise of his young cousin. ‘Doris is not really deep, you know.’

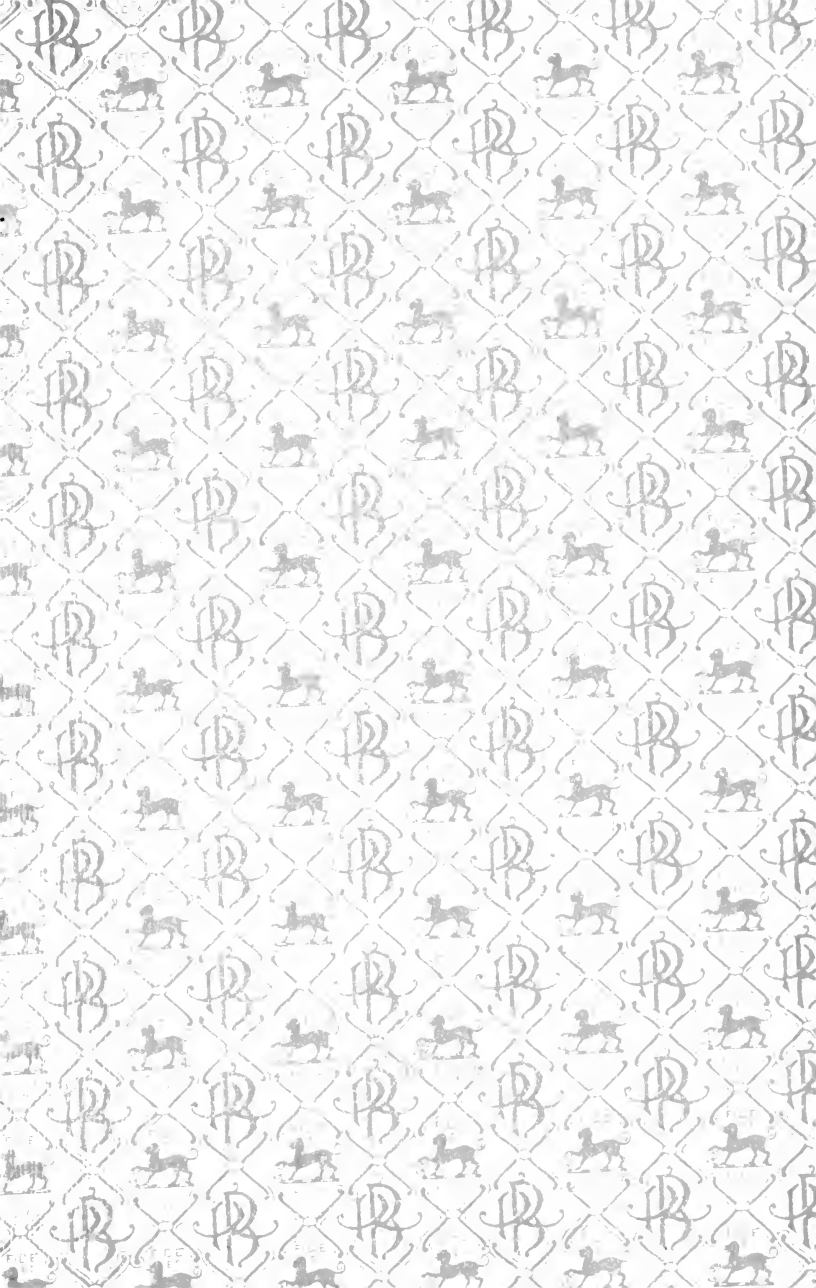
‘Don’t be too sure of that,’ was the oracular answer. ‘One should never be too sure of anything in this world. If I

am not mistaken, you do not understand Doris at all ; you have not begun to find her out. No one so blind as those who will not see. Take my advice, Mr. Hamlyn, and do not treat Doris as though she were still a child. Now I must be going, or Lionel will think I am lost, and he and all the dogs will be searching for me.' And Mrs. Hake shook his hand with her firm, generous grasp, and smiled at him.

'What on earth does the woman mean?' thought the bewildered young man, as he watched her from the open door. 'She means something—I could see that in her eyes. "Never be too sure of anything in this world ; and none are so blind as those who will not see." She is a clever woman—everyone says so ; and she is driving at something. Well, I was never a good hand at guessing riddles, so I may as well go and see Uncle Godfrey.' And Gerard squared his broad shoulders, and gave himself a little shake, like a big retriever, and then walked quickly across the hall and knocked at the library door.

END OF VOL. II.





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